Understanding Airport Passenger Experience

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Executive Summary

Background and objectives
This research was commissioned by the Department for Transport (DfT) to explore the experiences of passengers using UK airports. The objectives were to:

- Understand the key factors that affect airport experience in terms of the end-to-end journey;
- Compare experiences across passenger types; and
- Highlight passengers’ priorities for improvement.

The research used qualitative methods, in the form of focus groups and individual interviews. These were designed to explore the breadth of people’s perspectives, attitudes and experiences, but not to provide numerical findings or data which could be generalised to a wider population. The research was carried out in November 2008 by Independent Social Research.

Choosing an airport
In studying passenger experience, the research often touched upon the process of choosing which airport to use. The findings suggest airport choice was generally complex and respondents typically weighed up the pros and cons of different airports in reaching a decision. The study identified various interconnected and conflicting influences, but generally choice was based on:

- **The availability and cost of flights** - mostly factors concerning the flight rather than the airport.
- **Proximity and/or ease of access** - where possible, most respondents’ default choice was their nearest airport. Some respondents were willing to pay more for a flight in order to travel from their local airport.
- **Preference for a particular airport** - based on reasons such as perceived quality of service, familiarity and reliability.

Passenger experience
Respondents’ reported experiences of using UK airports were varied and multi-dimensional. Nonetheless, a set of three overarching principles emerged from the discussions: the demand for airports to provide a more passenger focused service that allows for personal control and ensures fairness. Beyond these, the issues raised by respondents as important to the passenger experience were categorised into six themes. They are outlined below, broadly in order of importance.

- **End-to-end reliability and efficiency**

Reliability at all stages of the airport journey was of primary importance to respondents. It ensured that they could plan and predict their journey and mitigated the risk of knock-on effects (on other parts of the airport journey or elsewhere). Respondents commonly
expected problems or delays, possibly because of the perceived vulnerability of the end-to-end journey to disruption from a host of factors, but in reality experience was often not so negative.

An important way that efficiency was judged was through queuing. Reducing the overall time in queues was a priority that respondents felt would help relieve stress and anxiety, as well as allow them more time to enjoy themselves in other parts of the airport. Ways of planning ahead and reducing uncertainty (online check-in, pre-booked parking) were thought to generally work well and were widely valued.

- **Information and communication**

  Respondents wanted good, accurate and real-time information flows to help them plan their journey and feel more in control, especially in departures, at boarding gates and in baggage areas. But information at airports – flight information especially - was often perceived to be limited, unreliable and poorly displayed. Particularly in the case of delays, participants wanted clear and accurate information from staff themselves, but this was thought to be rarely available. Respondents wanted to be kept fully aware of airport requirements and procedures (e.g. at check-in and security). There was some demand for more information about these and the rationale behind them.

- **Customer care**

  Good customer care was considered important, but often there was a feeling among respondents of being 'processed', with passenger priorities taking second place to the demands of airports and airlines. Respondents valued having proactive staff who took responsibility when issues arose, especially at ‘pinch points’ like check-in and boarding, or where delays or other problems occurred.

  Customer care was not seen as consistently available, except at certain stages of the journey or for higher price ticket holders. Respondents typically expected to receive a 'minimum' level of service irrespective of their ticket price although they did accept that a higher cost ticket would receive a premium service. In some parts of the passenger journey, respondents were unsure where to get help or were unable to find relevant staff. Where they existed, roaming general customer service staff were therefore much appreciated.

  Service standards for those with specific needs, such as parents with babies or people using wheelchairs, were variable. Respondents with disabilities which were not immediately apparent tended to feel that their needs were not actively addressed by airports.

- **Facilities and entertainment**

  A good range of facilities and entertainment often made respondents’ time in the airport more comfortable and enjoyable. But the findings suggest that different passenger groups have had competing wants in this regard, all of which ideally needed to be addressed by airports. For instance, those who travelled with young children valued children’s play areas, while respondents who travelled on business often appreciated quiet areas where they were able to concentrate on work. Respondents also noted a lack of services at departure gates and more generally 'out-of-hours' at some airports; the consensus was that most amenities should be available whenever flights were running.
• **Airport design and maintenance**

The study also highlights the influence of airport design and maintenance on passenger experience. Respondents suggested that the overall ambience of the airport and how clean and presentable it was projected a clear message and affected how they felt about using it. Comparisons were made with airports overseas, some of which were considered more modern, clean, airy and welcoming overall. More specifically, those with disabilities noted the need for improvements in some key aspects of accessibility and usability.

• **Cost**

High costs at airports were frequently mentioned. These were not unexpected, because respondents recognised that passengers represented a ‘captive market’ at airports. However some felt unfairly exploited, especially in areas such as short-term parking and food and drink. In terms of other facilities, business respondents were sometimes willing to pay extra to use services like quiet lounges but these tended not to be taken up by the leisure passenger groups.

There were of course differences in how each passenger type perceived the relative importance of these factors. For example, business travellers tended to have different priorities from leisure travellers, and people who travelled with babies and young children had a different perspective as did respondents with disabilities and health problems.

**Priorities for improvement**

Respondents felt that many aspects of the airport experience worked well: accessing the airport and transport links were often good; long-term parking facilities were usually well managed; on-line check-in and bag drop facilities were appreciated; shops and restaurants in departures were thought to offer variety; business lounges and facilities were often high quality and much appreciated; and assistance for wheelchair users, when booked in advance, was largely highly regarded. In these areas, the findings suggest the focus should be on maintaining high standards.

Other areas appeared highly variable including the predictability of journey times to airports; queue length and queue management at key stages throughout the airport; facilities for passengers who were travelling with children and babies; and efficiency of baggage collection on return to the UK. For less mobile respondents, ease of access to the departure gates was also variable. This implies that there is room for some airports to learn from best practice elsewhere.

Finally, there were areas that respondents perceived to be consistently poor and with the potential to substantially impair the airport experience. These included proactive customer care and problem resolution; provision of flight information and handling of delays; management of passenger flows through the airport; assistance and services for people with disabilities which might not have been immediately apparent; availability of quiet spaces suitable for those who wanted to work at the airport; and facilities and seating at departure gates. The findings suggest that these are all aspects that airports should therefore prioritise when seeking ways to improve passenger experience.
**Conclusions and implications**

Improving the passenger experience at UK airports depends on achieving a better understanding of passengers’ needs. This research has shown that the overall quality of respondents' experience depended on a complex web of interrelated variables and that passenger priorities varied according to respondents' characteristics, circumstances and reason for travel.

This study has provided an initial picture of key respondent priorities that airports could address, and has also highlighted the need to take account of ‘softer’ factors which cannot easily be measured by typical performance indicators. To make measurement more relevant to passenger experience, future metrics should aim to account for the six themes mentioned in this report and address whether airport users receive a *fair, passenger focused* service which grants them a feeling of *personal control*. 
1. Introduction

This is the report of small-scale qualitative research into the end-to-end journey experience of UK airport passengers. It was commissioned by the Department for Transport (DfT) in order to gather the views of passengers on the key issues which affected their journey experience, excluding any non-domestic elements of the journey and the flight itself. The research was designed to feed into a review of UK airport regulation, a key objective of which was to improve passenger experience.

1.1 Policy background

In April 2008, the Secretary of State for Transport announced a review of the framework for the economic regulation of airports with three public policy objectives:

- Improving the passenger experience;
- Encouraging appropriate and timely investment in additional capacity to help deliver economic growth in line with wider government policy; and
- Addressing the wider environmental impacts of aviation on airport development.

Submissions from a wide range of different stakeholder groups have been sought as an important part of the exercise, but the views of passengers – and in particular of different passenger groups – were considered by DfT to be under-represented, hence the decision to commission this piece of research.

1.2 Research objectives

The specific aims of this project were to:

- Understand the key factors that affected airport experience in terms of the end-to-end journey;
- Compare experiences across passenger types; and
- Highlight passengers' priorities for improvement.

1.3 Research methodology

This section provides a brief account of the research methods used. Copies of key fieldwork documents are included in the Appendices.

Approach

The research was carried out using focus groups supplemented by a small number of individual in-depth interviews. Focus group respondents included passengers aged 18 and over who had flown via a UK airport in the preceding 12 months. Individual interviews were conducted with people aged 70 and over and with passengers (across a range of ages) with disabilities or health problems.
Fieldwork locations were chosen not to reflect particular airports but to ensure the research captured views from a range of areas. Throughout November 2008, groups and interviews were carried out in:

- Guildford
- Manchester
- Bristol
- Norwich
- Glasgow

In each area two focus groups and two in-depth interviews were carried out as follows:

- **Focus groups** (8-10 participants)
  - 1 group with business passengers
  - 1 group with non-business passengers

- **Interviews**
  - 1 face-to-face interview with a passenger aged 70 or over
  - 1 face-to-face interview with a passenger with a disability or health problem.

In total, 78 individuals took part in the study. Focus groups typically lasted an hour and a half, interviews an hour. All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

**Respondent characteristics**

Focus group respondents were recruited to ensure the inclusion of a wide cross-section of passengers in terms of key demographic and socio-economic variables, as well as trip patterns and characteristics. They were not selected on the basis of which UK airports they had used; the aim was to ensure that the study covered a range of UK airports of different kinds. Airports used by respondents in the preceding 12 months are shown in Figure 1.

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1 Although the research cannot be considered 'representative', locations were selected to attain a broad mix of passengers living in different settings. Guildford was selected for the South East as it has a significant London commuter population (with many business travellers) but also is surrounded by some less urban (and less accessible) areas.

2 See Appendix A for details of the sample composition
Within both the focus groups and in-depth interviews, the emphasis was on understanding passenger experience throughout the end-to-end airport journey, with a particular focus on the priorities for improvement. The research did not cover any non-UK stages of the journey or in-flight experiences; in addition, perceptions of security policy were not within the study's scope. Figure 2 broadly outlines what was covered by the research.
Figure 2: Journey stages covered by the research

**GETTING TO THE AIRPORT**
- Travelling from the passengers' starting point to the airport (including changes/transfers)

**IN THE AIRPORT BUILDING**
- Check-in
- Passport control & security
- Departure lounge and facilities
- Getting to the departure gate
- At the departure gate

**BEFORE DEPARTURE**
- Boarding the plane
- Waiting for take off

**GETTING HOME (OR OTHER DESTINATION)**
- Travelling to the passengers' final destination (including changes/transfers home)

**IN THE AIRPORT BUILDING**
- Getting transfers/onward flights
- Immigration control
- Baggage reclaim
- Customs
- Arrivals area

**LANDING & DISEMBARKATION**
- Landing
- Taxi-ing to stand
- Getting off the plane
Sessions were conducted using a topic guide agreed with DfT; this provided a loose structure but allowed flexibility to respond to issues of interest or concern to passengers themselves.

Respondents were asked to draw on examples from recent journeys through UK airports. As described above, groups were composed of either business or non-business passengers. Although in reality many passengers form experiences from a range of journey types (leisure/business) respondents were asked to focus only on the journeys relevant to their group type (business/non-business) to ensure issues between the two were kept separate.

1.4 Note on analysis and reporting
All reported findings are grounded in the discussions conducted in the groups and interviews.

Qualitative research is typically based on small, purposively drawn samples designed to maximise exposure to the full range of experiences or attitudes that are of interest. It therefore does not provide statistical findings that can be generalised to the wider population.

Although qualitative research does not lend itself to statistical estimation (for example of the prevalence of views), this report aims to give a useful impression of the relative importance of views across the research in terms both of how often they emerged and the strength of feeling behind them.

1.5 Report structure
The remainder of the report is divided into chapters, as follows:

Chapter 2 – Choosing an airport
Chapter 3 – Factors affecting the airport passenger experience
Chapter 4 – Priorities for improvement
Chapter 5 - Conclusions and implications.
2. Choosing an airport

A combination of influences, dominated by ‘hard’ factors such as price and flight availability, emerged from this research as having had an effect on respondents’ choice of airport. Key factors were:

- The availability and cost of flights;
- Proximity of airport and ease of access; and
- Preference for a particular airport, based on reasons such as perceived quality of service, familiarity and reliability.

2.1 Availability and cost of flights

Respondents’ choice of airport was usually led by considerations such as destinations offered, choice and availability of flights and ticket prices - mostly factors concerned with the flight rather than the airport. For example, respondents who had travelled long-haul were less likely to have been able to use regional airports. Some respondents pursued cheaper tickets (both when travelling for business and leisure) even if it meant flying from airports other than their preferred choice, but this was not always the case.

2.2 Proximity and ease of access

All other things being equal however (i.e. availability and cost of flight permitting), most respondents said they preferred to use the airport that was easiest or most convenient for them to get to; often but not necessarily their nearest airport:

*Cardiff is better; it’s an hour door to door, straight down the motorway, you come off and park in the parking and you jump into a mini-bus. Bristol is 15 miles, but time-wise it’s an hour and a half.* (Bristol, non-business, male)

Some respondents were willing to pay more for a flight in order to travel from an airport offering the perceived benefits of a more convenient journey:

*There is no point in making your journey before you get to your plane any more difficult, so if you live within striking distance of Manchester, to me that is worth another £50 on your flight.* (Manchester, Business, female)

Respondents also recognised that higher ticket prices at local airports could be offset by the higher cost of travel and, possibly, the expense of an overnight hotel associated with airports further afield.

Some respondents with disabilities preferred using airports close to home not just because of journey convenience but also for psychological reasons. These included respondents with anxiety disorders and depression, but also those who were anxious about travelling because of physical problems.
2.3 Personal airport preferences

Airport size, familiarity and perceptions of service standards and reliability also factored into respondents’ choice of airport.

Some respondents felt that that smaller airports – often, but not necessarily, their local or regional airports – offered better customer care (were more passenger focused) than larger airports, were less congested and allowed them to feel more in control. Smaller airports were felt by respondents to be less formal, ‘more like a family airport’.

I like Bristol airport very much. I like smaller airports; you seem to get a better service. The airport is superb, booking in was no problem, going through security was no problem, car parking was no problem! They have a little bit more time for you [at smaller airports]. (Bristol, non-business, male)

I like Birmingham airport. For an international airport it is quite small, the hire place is within easy walking distance, check-in is round the corner, it is quite a big airport but you only need to be in a small part of it. (Glasgow, business, male)

I like Southampton. It is smaller. I like small airports. It is cleaner. I hate going into an airport and coming out feeling dirty like at Heathrow. (Guildford, business, female)

Familiarity with an airport – the journey there and back, processes and layout – was reassuring and important to some respondents.

Familiarity and/or size of airport were often key for respondents with disabilities, older respondents and less confident travellers. Both were felt to make travel easier for respondents and allowed them to feel more in control. Respondents with disabilities often stressed how much they valued the short distances within smaller airports.

Perception of airport reliability was important to all respondents, but was of particular relevance to business passengers who regarded delays on either leg of their journey as costly.

I usually come home expecting delays. When I come home and there are delays, it’s [eating into] my time. That’s part of the reason I don’t fly to East Midlands, the delays are horrendous, it’s worth going the extra distance to Birmingham (Glasgow, business, male)

A preference for more ‘manageable’ airports sometimes extended to business journeys to London. For example, some business respondents travelling to the capital preferred using smaller London airports, such as Stansted, because they considered it easier to leave the airport quickly and travel into central London. In contrast, Heathrow and Gatwick were described as being too crowded and ‘stressful’, and there was a concern that travelling via these airports would result in them being late for meetings or appointments:
Heathrow scares me to be honest, there are too many people... You just can't get to where you are going quick enough [if you land at Heathrow]. (Glasgow, business, female)

More generally, larger UK ‘hub’ airports, such as Heathrow, were sometimes rejected as transfer points on longer journeys in favour of European alternatives such as Paris Charles de Gaulle or Amsterdam Schiphol. In some cases, respondents said that they preferred the ambience of these European airports and were more confident that they would not be delayed and/or miss connecting flights.

[Schiphol airport is] nice and airy, and it's not as big and chaotic as Heathrow, which I would avoid like the plague,... I find it quite stressful to fly into Heathrow, especially if you have a connection. If you have a tight connection and you're kept up in the air above Heathrow for half an hour before you land, you're worried about whether your bags are going to travel with you. (Glasgow, business, male)

Schiphol leads by example. It is spacious, it has the footprint of Heathrow, and you can go anywhere in the world. It isn’t crowded, shops are lovely, staff are nice, there are little areas you can sit or sleep in, it is light and bright, the trains come right into it. It is so big but it isn’t a problem because you are so chilled. It really works...It is geared to cope. (Norwich, non-business, female)

The preceding discussion has shown that airport choice is a complex process. Although flight availability and price were important in determining respondents’ choice of airport, their influence could be moderated by other ‘softer’ factors associated with the passenger experience; these are explored in more detail in the next chapter.
3. Factors affecting the airport passenger experience

The main focus of this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experience of air passengers using UK airports: the nature and quality of that experience, the factors that affected it most and the priority areas where there was seen to be most scope for improvement. DfT defines the airport experience as encompassing journeys to and from UK airports as well as time spent at them. This is consistent with the perspective of respondents who generally regarded getting to and from airports as integral to their overall experience with a significant potential to affect satisfaction, mood and stress levels as well as practical outcomes.

3.1 Key themes and core principles

Issues raised by respondents which were thought to affect passenger experience clustered broadly into six overlapping themes, shown in Figure 3 below and described in more detail throughout this chapter. The relative importance of each of the themes is reflected in the order in which it is presented (although there was obviously some variation between participants, see for example section 3.8). The main themes were: end-to-end reliability and efficiency, information and communication, customer care and facilities and entertainment. In addition, elements of airport design and maintenance and cost could also be very important.

Figure 3: Key themes affecting the airport passenger experience
Cutting across all six themes, the research also identified a smaller number of core principles which, from the respondents’ standpoint, were important to a positive passenger experience. These help to contextualise respondents’ expectations and priorities and include:

- Passenger focus;
- Personal control; and
- Fairness.

**Passenger focus**
In general, respondents valued service at any stage in their end-to-end journey where their needs and wishes seemed to be both important and understood. The examples they provided ranged from helpful and caring staff through to good information, processes geared to the needs of passengers and services that could also be responsive to individual travellers’ requirements.

Respondents did not, however, always feel that a passenger focus was paramount at airports. Indeed, they sometimes felt that the needs of airlines and businesses took priority over those of passengers. A specific example mentioned included more time spent by respondents in ‘holding’ areas such as the boarding gate and less in areas where they wanted to be, namely the departure lounge (see section 3.5).

**Personal control**
‘Being in control’ was a term frequently used spontaneously by respondents when discussing aspects of their passenger experience. It was a state that they valued, especially perhaps because they often regarded airports as environments where they were more often controlled than in control, as one respondent put it:

> It is a controlled area. You are controlled. Your freedom is restricted by the controlling elements of the airport, which are [strong]. You can only walk in certain areas, function in certain ways, buy their food. (Norwich, non-business, male)

They welcomed opportunities to organise their journey at different stages to suit their personal needs, and therefore any service that widened their choices or options.

Personal control was important to all respondents, but perhaps especially to certain groups such as business passengers, people with disabilities and respondents who had travelled with young children. Respondents using larger, busier or unfamiliar airports were more likely to be anxious about loss of control than those using smaller, quieter, or more familiar airports.

**Fairness**
Fairness was a concept to which respondents were sensitive in airports. They appreciated that airports had to provide for the needs of a range of passengers, who all ultimately wanted an efficient journey, and there was an expectation that airports needed to balance
any divergent requirements fairly. However, respondents did not necessarily equate fairness with providing exactly the same service to all passengers. For instance, additional services provided to those who were prepared to pay more were generally seen to be fair (see section 3.5 on facilities and entertainment) as was any priority given to the needs of specific groups (for example young children and the adults who accompany them and people with disabilities).

The next section touches on the principles of passenger focus, personal control and fairness within the context of the six broad areas that affected respondents’ passenger experience.

### 3.2 End-to-end reliability and efficiency

This broad theme refers to how reliable and predictable respondents felt the end-to-end journey to be. Above all, respondents wanted to be sure of arriving at the airport, catching their flight and the flight leaving (or landing) on time. Within that, they also wanted a smooth and predictable passage through the journey stages without delays in the process that could be worrying, frustrating or tiring. This was of primary importance to respondents and the key to a good passenger experience for most.

The expectation that things could easily go wrong, although not explored in depth, seemed widespread and possibly reflected respondents' perceptions of a lack of *resilience* in air travel - a belief that journeys were vulnerable to problems caused by a host of factors ranging from traffic jams to the weather, technical faults, security alerts, over-worked systems and late passengers.

Respondents’ actual experiences were rarely so negative, however. They commonly noted the *absence* of problems on trips they had taken in the preceding 12 months, often expressing both surprise and pleasure.

*I expect negative and when things work out I go ‘Great!’* (Manchester, business, male)

**Journey reliability**

Respondents recognised the end-to-end journey as a process or chain of events in which entry into one journey stage could have been easily disrupted by delays ‘upstream’:

*You don’t want to be thinking, ‘if the taxi is late, I am going to be late at the airport, then I am going to be at the back of the queue’. It has a knock-on effect if things go wrong at that point.* (Manchester, business, male)

Dependable journey times – overall and at different stages of the journey – were regarded by respondents as necessary for effective journey planning and important to the management of associated travel stress and anxiety. Knowing how long the end-to-end journey would take was highly valued by respondents because it avoided the need to allow extra time overall for unforeseen delays. Frequent fliers in particular placed emphasis on
knowing that the end-to-end journey time would be unlikely to vary much on successive occasions.

Respondents noted that allowing extra time overall, to take account of the unreliability of journey stages, could unnecessarily increase the length of journey time if progress was smooth and some, in particular business travellers, resented this as time ‘wasted’:

If you leave loads of time, you can bet your bottom dollar you will be quicker at passport control and everything and then you will be left with loads of time and shops you don’t really want to use. (Norwich, business, male)

Respondents also placed high importance on knowing how long certain stages or parts of the process were likely to take, for example the time it would take to get to the airport or negotiate check-in. This mattered because it allowed respondents to plan ahead if, for example, they wanted to spend more or less time in the departure lounge. Again the extent to which this could vary on successive occasions was also important to participants.

The stages of the outward journey where respondents were most likely to have experienced reliability problems and therefore expected them included the journey to the airport (especially to major London airports), check-in and security. On the return leg, key journey stages where reliability was sometimes problematic included disembarkation, immigration and baggage reclaim.

Journey to and from the airport

When travelling to the airport, traffic hold-ups and road works (especially on principal routes to major airports such as Gatwick and Heathrow) and rush hour or commuter traffic more generally, were seen as main causes of unreliable journey times for those travelling by road:

We went to Heathrow and our flight check-in time was 8 o’clock. We left Norwich at 3 o’clock, which is 5 hours to do 160 miles. We got stopped [in traffic] three times at different points for a total of three hours and 35 minutes. (Norwich, non-business, male)

Respondents tended to mitigate any impact from delays by allowing extra time for the journey to the airport:

It is all part of the planning isn’t it? You have to take everything into account. Where I live, no matter what time you go there is always something happening [on the roads] and I have to take that into account. (Manchester, business, female)

Respondents valued services offering passengers some measure of control over the journey to the airport. Examples included airport hotels, where they were able to stay overnight in order to reduce uncertainty on the day of travel, and pre-booked car parking:
I want to know that I will be able to park and if I can possibly pre-book my car so that it is all bought and paid for and I can just drive in. It is about predictability. Me having control. (Norwich, non-business, female)

Taxis and lifts directly to the airport were seen to save time and avoided possible delays involved in parking, but public buses and coaches confined to fixed routes were felt by some to offer passengers less control over journey times in the event of hold ups on the roads.

Where available, trains were regarded as a good alternative to road travel by some respondents, especially where the train route was straightforward and services frequent and reliable. However, participants also worried about unscheduled cancellations of train services, delays and missed connections which they had little control:

I have been by train to Stansted and you change at either Ely or Cambridge. But it does add stress to the journey because I came into Ely once and I only had one minute to get across the platform and if I missed that connection I would miss the flight. And you are not in control of the train being late. (Norwich, business, female)

A key aspect influencing the reliability of journeys to and from airports was their **location and connectivity**. Generally, respondents valued airports that were accessible in terms of:

- Their proximity or closeness;
- How well connected they were to their hinterland by major road networks and by public transport systems; and
- The simplicity or convenience of the journey.

These were regarded as key components that saved respondents' time, increased reliability and offered choice in travel mode. Even where airports were not close by, respondents placed value on having ‘seamless’ journeys which reduced stress and helped them retain a sense of personal control.

*Manchester is well situated, it is well-connected. Even if you live in Rochdale or Oldham it is only going to take you half an hour to get to the airport.* (Manchester, non-business, male)

Parking areas close to terminals, well-run and ‘slick’ shuttle buses between car parks and terminals, enough conveniently sited drop-off and pick-up points, train terminals within airports and plentiful taxis (especially on the return journey) were all seen as efficient processes which enhanced the passenger experience:

*If someone drops you off at Manchester, they can do so really close to your door and you are straight in. And if you are parking, there is plenty of space and the car parks are close to the terminal. You are not walking miles – especially the short stay.* (Manchester, business, male)
For respondents with disabilities, airport proximity and the ease and convenience of the journey to the airport were mentioned as particularly important factors.

Some of the aspects listed above were felt generally to be quite good at UK airports, for example airport parking and connecting shuttle buses. Commonly mentioned problem areas that respondents felt signified inefficient systems or increased uncertainty in their travel included pick-up points which were felt to be inconvenient at many airports. There was some perception that in recent years these have been moved further away from terminal buildings, and free waiting times were limited.

*It’s very difficult at Manchester for anybody to come and meet you. They used to allow private vehicles to go to a certain point close enough by for anyone to walk to it. But now anybody going to Manchester airport has got to park the car in a multi-storey car park and then they come looking for whoever they are picking up.*
*(Manchester interview, elderly male with breathing and mobility problems)*

Other problems mentioned included a lack of taxis or public transport connections at certain times of the day (e.g. late at night, early morning). Pick-up and drop-off was a particular issue for those with disabilities or mobility problems, who used family members to take them to and from the airport. These respondents also mentioned they needed to have wheelchairs immediately available at drop-off points.

**Journey within the airport**

The number of desks or channels open was seen as a main factor affecting journey times and reliability at check-in, security or immigration. Differences according to time of day or day of the week were to some extent expected but sometimes introduced variation in journey times through key stages and were a source of frustration for some respondents:

*[There are] not enough staff at two o’clock in the morning [at immigration]. At Gatwick you may have only two people or three, whereas in the day you might have ten.*
*(Norwich, non-business, female)*

Less acceptable, especially to business respondents, were variations in staffing levels on trips made regularly:

*I fly from Stansted to Dublin fairly frequently, and it will be the same time flight, and you’ll go and there will be different numbers of staff on...sometimes there’ll be full staff, and other times it’ll be like a skeleton staff. And you think, well this is a regular trip that I make, why is the staffing so different? ...The queues are, you know, massive when there aren’t so many staff there.*
*(Norwich, business, male)*

On-line check-in was valued by some respondents because it meant less time spent at check-in and, once again, because of the measure of control over journey reliability it afforded:
Taking the worry out of things [with on-line check-in] is important because I am a terrible worrier. It is nice to think that we have got our seats booked – we wanted certain seats. And it takes the worry out of things, even if there are jams on the road. (Guildford, non-business, female)

Baggage reclaim could also be unpredictable and respondents commented on the impact that delays could have on their onward journey, for example missing their train home. Some carousels were thought by respondents to be too small with not enough space around them for passengers to collect luggage, resulting in further delay. Some respondents said that they had taken to travelling with hand luggage only, where possible, in order to avoid hold-ups at both check-in and baggage reclaim.

Flight delays

As well as getting to and through the airport, delays to flights were of paramount concern to respondents. Although frequent experience of delays was not commonly reported, the possibility caused anxiety for some and affected perceived reliability. Delays were dreaded because of potential knock-on consequences at passengers’ destinations in both directions, for example in terms of missed transport connections and business meetings. One Manchester business respondent whose flight was delayed said it was ‘as good as a cancellation’ because she missed her meeting and the purpose of the trip was therefore ‘null and void’.

Respondents also resented delays because of the time they would then have to spend at the airport with the attendant boredom, stress and expense (see section 3.5).

Queue management

Typically, respondents expected to experience queues at airports, and the absence of them was usually a positive surprise:

Check-in at Terminal 5 was empty – amazing! (Guildford, non-business, female)

Although long queues were sometimes frustrating for participants, there was some recognition that they often moved much faster than expected, and this was also regarded as a bonus:

The last time I went to Newcastle on the 8.30 flight it was a Monday morning. The queue was very long, really quite bad… I thought ‘Oh my God what is going on?’, but they did get through it reasonably quickly. (Bristol, business, female)

However, queues – at check-in, security, boarding and immigration control – were felt to be a key and an increasingly characteristic feature of the passenger experience at airports. Queues were not only considered a sign of poor management but also had an impact on the timing of follow-on stages of their airport journey. They were also resented by some
participants who felt as though they were being processed or herded and that time spent standing in line increasingly reduced time available for other activities:

*It is now one long queue. The days are gone now in terms of enjoyment. You get there and you queue to check-in, you queue to go through security. You can’t even have a drink anymore, there isn’t time. It is a total chore. (Guildford, non-business, male)*

Some respondents pointed out that since check-in desks were often not open more than two hours before take-off, it wasn’t even possible to check-in early, avoid queues and have more time in departures.

Spending a lot of time queuing was particularly problematic for some groups of travellers. For example, respondents who travelled with small children, some older participants and some with health problems or disabilities:

*The check-in is the hardest part for us, because you have got the children and you try to keep them contained, and you are in a queue, and they want to go running off and you can’t run off because you’ll lose your place in the queue. So that is a bit stressful. (Bristol, non-business, female)*

*If I was going on another trip, I wouldn’t want to stand for too long, standing in a queue at check-in, and then standing for security... 15 minutes or so and it is really getting painful. I’d just like to sit down to be honest (Bristol, interview - arthritis, male)*

Some respondents felt it would be helpful to have designated or express queues for people with disabilities, for example at check-in, although they recognised there would need to be a system for identifying passengers eligible to use them.

Respondents found it particularly frustrating and annoying to wait in long queues at airports when few desks were open. At check-in this was usually recognised as being an airline rather than airport responsibility, and due to insufficient desks being open to deal with the volume of passengers:

*It isn’t as though it is a surprise and you have all just turned up. They know exactly how many people will be coming. (Manchester, non-business, female)*

Participants sometimes indicated that they were more prepared to tolerate long queues at check-in if they had paid less for their ticket (although they still wanted 'basic service standards').

*There is still a level of service that you want. Just because you are travelling economy, you don’t want things to be unacceptable. (Manchester, business, male).*
However, the willingness to accept this perceived price-service trade-off did not necessarily extend to other areas such as security and immigration control, which were not seen to be related to airlines. Insufficient desks open at these points to deal with passenger volumes was a main cause of dissatisfaction:

*Last time I flew from Heathrow it was a nightmare. They were queuing right around [in security]. You are frustrated, because you want to get through and get to your gate. It is frustrating when you see staff standing around. You think ‘put some more staff on, you can see there is a queue’. (Guildford, business, female)*

*Passport control at Glasgow is a nightmare, there were three flights which landed at the same time as us, and it was so crowded for two people on the desks. (Glasgow, non-business, male)*

Respondents commented on various queuing systems they came across at airports, main examples of which were:

- **Mono-queues** – a single line for all flights with passengers directed to service desks as they become free (the queue often channelled through a rope maze)
- **Multiple queues** – individual/multiple lines for each specific flight, giving passengers more choice about which queue to join.

**Mono-queues** tended to be seen as fair by enforcing a first come first served rule:

*Everyone knows where they are and there is a system to it. (Bristol, non-business, female)*

However, some respondents simply did not like the long ‘snake-like’ line associated with this system, even when moving fairly swiftly:

*It winds me up, the constant shuffle, shuffle. I feel like I am being processed. If you have these huge snaking queues you tend to think someone is controlling what you are doing. (Guildford, interview 70+, female)*

At check-in, with passengers for different flights operated by the same airline constantly joining the end of the queue, there was a perception that at busy times the average length of a mono-queue did not change. Respondents felt this took away their option of waiting for the queue to die down before joining it.

Slow moving mono-queues at check-in and security sometimes also increased respondents’ anxiety about missing their flight. Passengers with imminent flights are sometimes called to the front of mono-queues. Commenting on this, respondents tended to empathise with the plight of passengers who might miss their flights because of the queuing system rather than query the fairness of passengers being ushered ahead of people waiting in front of them in line. Indeed they tended to voice concerns about not hearing a call for passengers on their own flight to go forward.
I’ve known people miss flights because of that, because they haven’t heard somebody shout. And they were major flights to New Zealand and places, they haven’t heard the person say, ‘Can we have flight number so and so,’ ‘cos they’re so way back in the queue. (Guildford, non-business, female)

Multiple queues were appreciated by some respondents because they were felt to give more control to passengers as it allowed them to choose which queue to join and when. Others, however, felt this system was more likely to be disorderly and unfair, especially if not well-managed:

It is just like a bun fight. You have got one gate open and it is a nice orderly queue and then they realise they are not going to get 100 people checked in so they open another [desk] and that causes mass migration of people trying to fall over their suitcases to get to the new check-in. (Bristol, non-business, male)

I think it is a shambles, they really don’t care, it’s not organised at all. There are lots of desks and the queues don’t make it clear which desk you should choose. (Glasgow, non-business, female)

Strong queue management at all stages was important to respondents because it reduced anxiety and provided reassurance that someone was ‘in charge’:

What you need is a sergeant major! (Glasgow, non-business, male)

At check-in, respondents valued the presence of staff advising passengers how best to prepare for their ‘turn’: reminding them which documents to have ready, checking their flight details, reminding them about baggage restrictions and security requirements and answering their questions. This preference was in addition to, rather than instead of, having sufficient desks open to deal swiftly with customers:

[Budget airlines] know [queuing time] is bad because they employ extra people to patrol the queues and give out messages. So they clearly know they have a big queuing problem. But why they don’t re-deploy people to check-in desks, I don’t know. (Norwich, business, male)

At the departure gate, boarding by rows and priority boarding (for people with disabilities and with children) were widely regarded as good practice but needed to be well implemented. Respondents felt that this was often not the case:

Priority boarding [for budget flights], I mean that whole thing is a joke isn’t it? [Any passengers] just get in the priority queue, you know... You’ve got four or five people at the desk... all just standing there looking at each other while, you know, the 300 people are just totally ignoring any announcement and everybody’s barging through. (Norwich, business, female)
Unallocated seating on budget airlines was generally seen to exacerbate the stress and anxiety associated with boarding:

*People are panicking and it is just not good. They want to get the best seat, everybody is rushing. (Bristol, business, female)*

**Summary – End-to-end reliability and efficiency**

Being largely unaffected by problems - in terms of getting to and through the airport and taking off on time - counted significantly towards a good overall passenger experience. Respondents often expected problems to occur, but in fact noted the general absence of them on trips they had taken recently.

Respondents placed a high premium on the **reliability of journey times** to and through airports which were seen to have room for improvement. Uncertainty over how long the end-to-end journey will take, in particular getting to and from some airports, was a cause of concern for most respondents. This was one reason why airport locations and connections – including transport links and parking provision - influenced many respondents' choice of airport. They placed value on having ‘seamless’ journeys to and from airports.

The length of time respondents spent at key points within the airport, such as check-in and security, due to the number of desks or channels open was also seen as an important factor.

**Flight delays and queues** at airports were, for most respondents, key ways in which efficiency was judged. Queues were felt to be an increasingly characteristic feature of the passenger experience at airports. ‘Mono-queues’ were generally seen as fair, but this depended on good queue management which respondents valued. Reducing the overall amount of time spent queuing was a priority for respondents that they felt would help relieve stress and anxiety, as well as allowing them more time to enjoy themselves in other parts of the airport.

### 3.3 Information and communication

Information provision at airports affected respondents' ability to find their way about and to plan their journey through the airport. It also had an impact on their general feeling of personal control. A number of different aspects were identified including:

- Information about flights and flight delays
- Information about baggage reclaim
- Information about airport/airline requirements
- Signage and directions.

Respondents valued up-to-date, accurate and detailed information about flights. They wanted flight information to be easily accessible - that is for screens to be plentiful, conveniently placed and clearly visible. They wanted to know when their flight would be leaving, which gate it would be going from, when they would be boarding, when they would be needed at the departure gate, and if delays were announced, how long they could expect to have to wait and why.
However, participants felt that flight information monitors or screens at airports were not always easy to read or conveniently sited. Respondents sometimes pointed to information displays at train stations which were considered to be much more user-friendly. Respondents complained specifically about small screens awkwardly sited overhead and about monitors in the departure lounge and at gates that were not visible from key seating areas.

At Stansted the monitors are 12 inches wide and 8 foot above your head. You end up with people crowded around the bottom of them, squinting up at the screen. You would expect that at modern-day airports you would have screens the size of a wall map. It is odd. It is one of the easiest problems to fix. Train stations are so much better. (Norwich, business, male)

At Manchester [airport], in the bars and restaurants, they have all the monitors facing one way and all the seating with their backs to them. So you have to get up and look behind you. And when you get to the gates there isn’t a monitor at each gate, so you have to get up, walk and look for one. If you are travelling on your own, you can’t leave your luggage there, so you have to take it all with you. (Norwich, business, female)

Especially while waiting in the departure lounge, respondents expected a series of screen messages or instructions, informing them about progress towards boarding and take-off and telling them what they should be doing, for example proceeding to the boarding gate. This was felt to be important because it enabled them to plan their time to suit themselves, and determine the pace of their own passage through the departure area. However, respondents commonly complained about stages being skipped which could result in them being taken by surprise by the final call for passengers:

Nothing was on the board and we were sat having a drink and taking it in turns to go and have a look [at the monitor]. There wasn’t even a gate number. Then suddenly the gate number appeared and final call and we legged it down and only just got there in time. And we had been sat at the airport for two hours. (Manchester, non-business, female)

Respondents also complained about being given information that was misleading or simply wrong, especially apparently premature issuing of boarding notices that then resulted in long waits at the departure gates:

We order another beer and suddenly they are putting out ‘Last call’. So we think ‘**** we had better get going’, and we rush down in five minutes and have to wait an hour! They have conned you that the flight is going. (Guildford, non-business, male)

Although apparently contradictory experiences, both of the examples above suggest a need for consistency in the sequence and timing of messages issued to passengers.
Information provided on screen about flight delays was strongly criticised by respondents - they felt that it was often inadequate in terms of reasons for and likely length of delays:

*Delay announcements should be more specific. If you know what causes the delay you could probably have some sympathy with the situation...you know I think that they underestimate people.* (Guildford, interview 70+, female)

When flights were delayed respondents commonly wanted to talk to airline staff, but said this was often not possible. Some complained that even when staff were available they were ‘fobbed off’ with vague assurances and even misinformation:

*Sometimes they know your plane isn’t going anywhere for four hours. But they don’t tell you that. They just say ‘Come back in an hour, come back in an hour’.* (Manchester, non-business, female)

Respondents also wanted good real-time information at baggage reclaim. In addition to letting passengers know which carousel their luggage would be delivered to, some respondents said they valued information about how long they would have to wait, when the first bags could be expected and the estimated time by which the last pieces would appear. Delays at reclaim were reported by respondents and considered to be problematic - by that stage in their journey they were keen to be out of the airport and on their way home.

In addition to flight-specific information, advance information about different airport requirements could also improve the passenger experience, for example at security.

Respondents commented on various aspects of security checks at airports, in particular the apparent variability of procedures between and within airports. Variation in procedures, from the respondents' perspective, meant not knowing what would be expected of them but also led some respondents to worry if it meant checks were not always being carried out as thoroughly as they thought they should be. Respondents felt that there was scope to improve passenger experience of security checks through dissemination of clearer information about security procedures.

Apart from in security, respondents were aware of the need to conform to airline and airport requirements in a variety of other areas such as baggage allowance for checked-in and hand luggage and documents required for check-in and passport control. They were keen not to exceed allowances or break any rules, since this may have resulted in hold-ups, extra expense, stress and aggravation. However, they were not always confident of meeting these rules, especially respondents who had used budget airlines (often subject to tighter

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\(^3\) Respondents generally were not aware that specific requirements could be randomly assigned to passengers.
controls on luggage) and less frequent fliers who were unfamiliar with airline and airport routine.

Travelling to and from airports, and moving around within terminal buildings, respondents wanted good signs to tell them where they were and helped them find where they needed to get to.

At larger airports, especially those involving long gate transfer times, respondents welcomed signs which told them how long it would take them to get to their gate. Those with mobility problems emphasised the need to know how far they would have to walk so they could allow themselves plenty of time with frequent rests, or seek assistance. One respondent with mobility problems thought it would be a good idea for airports to have more signs for passengers with disabilities, indicating where facilities are available but also pointing out easy routes (e.g. shorter distances, fewer stairs or changes of level, hand rails, more seats on which to rest, wider access).

Some respondents also said that toilets were not always well sign-posted. In case toilets were out of order, they would appreciate notices telling passengers where to find the closest alternatives.

Respondents with disabilities often said that thinking and planning ahead was important when travelling. They therefore valued any information that helped them in this – for example details about specific disability services but also more generally about airport layout. Once at the airport, they appreciated clear information being made available – for example about where to leave wheelchairs once they had finished with them, or where to find disabled toilets, without having to seek it out or ask directly.

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According to respondents, standards of airport information and communication were variable and they identified a clear need for improvement in some areas. Although valued throughout the airport, information was felt to be especially crucial in departure areas and at boarding gates. Good information was also wanted at baggage reclaim.

Respondents wanted flight information to be easily accessible, accurate and detailed. Specific criticisms were made of the location, design and content of screens or monitors at some airports. Information about which gate their flight was going from, when they should proceed there and when they would be boarding was generally expected.

If delays were announced, respondents wanted as much information as possible on how long they would wait and why. In these circumstances, respondents wanted airline staff to be available to talk to directly.

Individual respondents with disabilities or health problems said information, especially advance information, about services specifically to meet special needs and about matters of particular concern to them such as airport layout, would have improved their passenger
experience. In general they preferred not to have to draw attention to their needs at the airport in order to receive or find such information.

3.4 Customer care

After end-to-end reliability and efficiency and information and communication, good quality customer care emerged as very important to all respondent groups, with the potential significantly to affect their overall experience and assessment of UK airports. Important aspects covered here include:

- Friendliness/ helpfulness of staff
- Service for those with particular needs
- Problem resolution.

Friendliness/ helpfulness of staff

Many respondents felt that staff attitudes influenced the quality of their experience; friendly and helpful staff could lift mood, help calm nerves and generally enhanced the holiday spirit of leisure travellers while brusque, unfriendly treatment from staff had the opposite effect.

You are anxious...it only takes one smile, one helpful comment and you feel better. (Guildford, non-business, female)

Some respondents commented on their encounters with unfriendly and unhelpful airline staff at check-in and departure gates. Budget airline staff in particular were perceived by some to be under-trained in customer care, tired and overworked. As reported earlier in relation to check-in queues, to some extent respondents expected a trade-off between value and quality of service, but they still felt that a minimum standard should apply. Those who had used full-service airlines (especially those flying business/first class) generally expected and received much higher levels of customer care. Generally, respondents appreciated assistance from proactive airline staff on hand to volunteer help, advice and guidance, for example with self check-in.

Respondents also valued 'floating' customer care general airport staff, especially but not only on the outward journey, although these were not thought to be widely provided. Respondents felt that having these types of staff available would provide a more 'joined-up' service throughout the airport experience. Reported experience varied: many commented that there was rarely anyone around to ask for general help and advice at airports, but at particular airports and times others had found that there were staff for this purpose, and they were appreciated.

Heathrow and Gatwick are very organised; they have a lot of people telling you where to go and where to stand. We got there and we didn’t know where to go, so somebody took us right to it. (Bristol, non-business, female 1)
What I see at airports is there are always a lot of security people, but there is never anyone around who is just happy to help. There are never any people around who you can approach, whatever your problem may be. And that would be nice. (Bristol, non-business, female 2)

Extra staff around queuing points (e.g. check-in and security) were generally welcomed (see section 3.2 ‘Queue management’). Some respondents would rather ‘extra’ staff were deployed on desks, but they were very much appreciated by others, including less confident travellers.

Some respondents said security arrangements at airports, though welcome, reminded them of the potential terrorist threat and increased their anxiety levels. They also often described themselves as stressed for other reasons at this stage in their journey and keen to get through to departures. Security processes could be particularly onerous for respondents with disabilities, for example if they found it hard to take off and put on articles of clothing or had medical equipment and supplies that needed to be checked. Polite and helpful security staff were thought to make respondent experiences at security much more tolerable.

Most described their experiences at security as variable, with some staff members perceived to have been friendly and polite, others efficient but not especially friendly, and a small minority were considered to have been brusque or even rude.

Staff [at security] have no customer service skills, so you don’t feel like you are a customer. (Guildford, business, female)

There was also some discussion of respondents’ experience of immigration control staff - some had experienced a friendly welcome which was valued. Respondents were generally keen to get through immigration as quickly as possible and did not need or expect much assistance at this stage in their journey.

At baggage reclaim some would have appreciated staff checking luggage tags to make sure that passengers were taking only items that belonged to them, although this was not something commonly mentioned in the groups. More staff on hand in these areas would also have been valued by respondents who needed help retrieving their bags from the carousel or who had other baggage related problems.

Service for those with particular needs

Customer service for those who travelled with babies or small children seemed variable. In some cases, they were impressed, for instance by being able to take their buggy right up to the aircraft and having priority boarding procedures. In others, they were left by staff to fend for themselves.

I was really impressed at Bristol, actually. I took my buggy all the way up the steps of the plane and they put it on the plane for me... being able to strap [my two year-old] in was much better. (Bristol, non-business, female)
We've got a baby and he's only two. There are not many baby facilities and I don't feel the staff are well trained. I've had a few incidents where we didn't know where to go. They didn't tell us what to do with the pram. We didn't know if we should take it to the plane or leave it there. (Glasgow, non-business, male)

Respondents in wheelchairs were, reportedly, often well served if their needs were known in advance by the airport or airline. Several respondents were impressed by apparent improvements in this area of airport service.

Facilities for disabled people or those with broken limbs are a lot better now than they were in the past. My wife hurt her leg when we were on holiday. They supplied a wheelchair and somebody to push her about, at Manchester and Glasgow. (Glasgow, non-business, male)

However, there were also some examples of more negative experiences. Some respondents using airport wheelchair services recalled instances when they felt they had been forgotten by staff. For example, one elderly man waited for an hour for someone to collect him from the plane on arrival into the UK. One female respondent was taken to baggage reclaim by a member of staff who did not speak English and abandoned her without explanation. Later she was taken to the car park to meet up with family members, but through secluded parts of the airport, which made her feel very vulnerable. She worried that the rest of her party, including the taxi driver, would not be able to find her.

Respondents with other (less visible) forms of disability, impairment or illness often felt the level of service they received was not provided at the same standard as passengers requiring wheelchairs. Indeed, it was felt that airline or airport staff were rarely willing or able to help, and were not especially sensitive to their needs. For example, one older man had recently had an operation on his knees and asked if it was possible to have a seat with more leg room – a request which was denied. One participant suffering from depression was taking medication which made her sleepy at night. When her flight was delayed she asked staff if she could lie down and was told there was nowhere available.

I was delayed on a flight for 12 hours and it was horrendous. There was nowhere to sleep, I take medication at night and I have to sleep, but there was nowhere, everything is shut at night. There was another boy who was handicapped and it was horrendous for his parents. (Glasgow, interviewee suffers from depression, female)

In some cases, older respondents and those with disabilities or health problems said they were reluctant to draw attention to themselves by asking for special treatment:

I don't like anyone to know. I don't like to make a fuss. (Glasgow, interview with respondent suffering from depression, female)

They also did not want to seem to be exploiting their situation, or asking for services to which they were not entitled because they were needed by others worse off. Respondents felt that even for some basic needs the onus was on the disabled passenger to seek help
rather than on the service provider to make it freely available. For example, at some
airports, toilets for disabled people were kept locked and passengers needing to use them
had to find a member of staff with a key, something that was impractical for many.

Overall, these respondents sometimes felt that staff were not equipped to respond to
requests from passengers unless they were in a wheelchair, although they recognised the
difficulty for staff of identifying non-visible disability. Also, it was not always clear to the
respondents how they could request help, and they tended to assume that there were no
facilities available.

If someone came to me and asked me if I wanted help [walking to where I need to
go] I would [accept]. But when I book I never tell them I am disabled. Maybe I
should... Would they help me then? Would they know from my ticket then [that I
need help]? (Manchester, interviewee with head injuries, female)

One respondent said she felt she was often in an ‘unequal’ race at airports in general, for
example when she needed to get a trolley or needed to move through queues and
processes quickly. She suggested some facilities (chairs, trolleys) could be ‘earmarked’ for
use by passengers with special requirements to ensure a reliable supply. Trolleys were
valued by other respondents with disabilities for the physical support they offered and they
indicated that they would appreciate the chance to use them in all areas of the airport. At
baggage reclaim, some older and disabled respondents would have welcomed help in
retrieving their baggage from the carousels.

Problem resolution
Customer service at airports was particularly mentioned by respondents when they had
encountered problems. Typically, respondents reported a shortage of staff available when
they needed to ask for help; they perceived a lack of staff taking overall responsibility and
little focus on the passengers' interests. This was a view taken particularly in the case of
flight delays:

Ideally, if the flight is delayed by three or four hours, they should have your phone
number and phone you up [before you get to the airport] and say, don’t worry,
don’t come down yet. (Glasgow, non-business, male)

Other instances when respondents experienced a lack of help included where hold luggage
or hand luggage was too large or overweight, was damaged or went missing. Respondents
said they found it very difficult to find anyone at the time to take responsibility and that
staff showed little interest in helping:

They just did not care to be honest. My friend’s bag was lost, she rang them every
day, and not them chasing her back, she had to ring them. (Bristol, non-business,
female)
The exceptions, where staff showed concern and made efforts to resolve the situation, were greatly appreciated by respondents. In one case, staff made the effort to return a child’s suitcase containing toys and entertainment:

_The staff were lovely, they were brilliant. The following morning by courier our bucket and spade were delivered. The time and the trouble and the courtesy, they were excellent. They were courteous with the children, they talked to them and they made them feel important._ (Bristol, non-business, female)

This research did not specifically cover passengers’ understanding of the agencies responsible for different services at airports, their knowledge of who to ask for help or who to complain to. This could be an important area to explore further.

**Summary – Customer care**

Important aspects of customer care include: the friendliness and helpfulness of staff; service for those with particular needs; and problem resolution.

When high standards of customer care were achieved, this reportedly had a real impact on passenger experience. However, too often airports were not perceived to offer this level of service and respondents felt there was rarely anyone to take responsibility for problems or keep passengers informed, particularly when flights were delayed. This is a key area in which the passenger experience could be improved.

Going through the security area was often onerous and raised stress levels, and staff attitudes and general customer care levels here were reported to be variable.

Many respondents indicated they would appreciate more general customer service staff for the airport overall or a more ‘joined up’ customer service. Specific areas where respondents suggested customer service provision could be improved included a more welcoming approach to passengers in the arrivals area and more staff at baggage reclaim to check luggage labels and help those who struggled to pull luggage from the carousels.

In some areas, for example check-in, respondents understood the different responsibilities of airline and airport staff. In others they felt they had little guidance on how and where to obtain help. All too often help was considered to be unavailable or inadequate.

### 3.5 Facilities and entertainment

Respondents expected some facilities (primarily shops and cafés) and passenger entertainment to be provided at airports. These emerged as necessary to a positive passenger experience, but of lower priority generally than earlier themes namely reliability and efficiency, information and communication and customer care.

Most UK airports offer some facilities or entertainment for passengers, including on arrival at the airport, at the departure gate and after clearing customs on the return to the UK. But
it was the facilities provided in the *departure lounge* that drew most discussion from respondents.

This was the area regarded by most as the enjoyable, even ‘fun’, part of their journey and therefore affected how they felt about airports. Having passed through check-in and security, respondents felt they were able to relax and enjoyed the free time prior to boarding. The provision of shops, restaurants, other forms of entertainment or ways to pass the time (including sitting quietly relaxing, reading or working) was important, even for business travellers.

Most respondents said they preferred to spend a larger proportion of their total time at airports in the departures area than they were generally able to do (i.e. less time in check-in, security and at the gate). They pointed out that increased queues at check-in and security meant that this part of the airport process had become 'squeezed' in terms of time:

*The queues [before the departure lounge] are longer now than they used to be. You used to be able to sit down and have a couple of drinks. You would have a good hour before boarding, but now you find you have got into the bar and you are looking at the clock because you have only got ten minutes or so. [I liked it before] because you wound down. It put you in the holiday mood. (Guildford, non-business, male)*

Generally respondents valued having a range of shops, restaurants, cafés and bars, catering to different budgets. Browsing through the shops, topping up on necessities such as toiletries or buying luxury items, or just ‘having a wander’ were seen as pleasant ways to pass the time in departures, and this required a reasonable range of facilities. When respondents experienced long flight delays they ended up spending more time in the departure lounge, therefore the availability of facilities became all the more important. Respondents’ expectations were higher at larger airports than at smaller airports. Generally, respondents indicated that they were quite satisfied with a modest array of facilities provided at smaller airports which had less space and a lower volume of passenger traffic to support commercial franchises.

Respondents identified eating and drinking as an important part of the passenger experience. In particular, those who travelled for leisure saw it as a way of getting into the holiday mood.

*We just go straight to the bar because that’s the start of your holiday. If they didn’t have bars at the airport it would just be so boring. You’d be cheesed off. (Bristol, non-business, male)*

However, food and drink was seen to be expensive although to some extent respondents recognised and accepted that this tended to be the case wherever there was a ‘captive market’ (see section 2.6). There was particular resentment about having to pay high prices for water, especially because they were prevented from bringing their own through security. There were some comments about poor service standards provided in airport cafés and
bars, commonly related to slow service and staff members who were not fluent in English. This was felt to be a particular problem on occasions when respondents only had a short period of time before their flight was due to depart.

Some respondents felt there was often insufficient seating in general in departure areas, partly because there were so many shops and restaurants. (See section 2.5 for further discussion of airport seating.) Many respondents also wanted a designated quiet area in the departure lounge where they could work or read or simply sit and relax. However, quiet areas were often felt to be lacking outside of ‘paid for’ facilities such as business or frequent flier lounges (see also section 3.7).

Another issue related to the lack of facilities at departure gates was noted by several respondents. When they were at the gate for a short time this was not considered to be a serious problem, but if flights were delayed the lack of services was perceived to be much more annoying.

*You sit in some little booth with absolutely nothing going on apart from some little place where they serve coca-cola at about £8 a bottle. Dreadful.* (Guildford, non-business, male)

Several respondents commented that shops and bars at airports tended to stay open only during normal shopping hours. However, many arrived at the airport for flights early in the morning or late at night, and in many cases they found a lack of facilities at these times.

*You get a late flight or something and [the outlets] have closed. So I think [airports] ought to have to provide a service like the train services are forced to. They all want to operate between about six in the morning to nine at night. [The outlets] ought to be forced to stay open to cover other times.* (Guildford, non-business, male)

Respondents delayed at airports beyond normal opening times found the time spent waiting was particularly onerous if they were left with little to do to help pass the time:

*When flights are delayed into the night, everything is closed and the seating is terrible [and] there’s nowhere to lie down.* (Glasgow, non-business, female)

There were isolated complaints about the lack of facilities on the landside (before security) of some airports but this was not a major concern. On arrival back into the UK, there was little demand for additional services and facilities in passport control or baggage collection, as respondents’ main priorities were to get through the airport as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Interestingly, it was in the departure lounge where the needs of different respondent groups varied most notably and where their specific requirements in terms of facilities could conflict with one another. Respondents felt that the departure lounge needed to fulfil a wide range of roles and therefore issues such as space management, zoning, the flow of
passengers and the location of facilities were all perceived to be of crucial importance to meeting respondents’ varying needs.

The provision of services and facilities for respondents who travelled with babies and young children was often mentioned. Respondents who were parents were conscious of the feelings of other passengers and also of the needs of their children in terms of being kept fed and entertained:

*People with ‘screaming kids’ are also on holiday and they want it to be stress-free. And if they have nowhere to take the children to play and let off a bit of steam, then they are thinking ‘I have got to spend three or four hours on a flight now with this child who is already wound up’. (Manchester, non-business, female)*

Respondents with children appreciated airports, such as Cardiff, which provided a children’s play area. They felt they were able to allow their children to run around without annoying other passengers and felt reassured that their children were not going to get lost. Facilities like these were thought to be rare, however. Generally respondents’ perception was that UK airports catered poorly for children.

*When we travel without the children it’s a nice experience. We can go to the airport, relax and have a meal. When you’ve got children you’re in a totally different ball game. You end up packing a big bag full of games and magazines and things to occupy them, because if there’s a delay, there are no areas for the children. Cardiff is good because they have a play area with one exit and entrance. (Bristol, non-business, female)*

*They used to have TVs in airports. Admittedly you had to pay for them, but you could put money in and sit with the child and watch cartoons. There is nothing like that [now]…you know if your flight is delayed it is going to be hell. (Manchester, non-business, male)*

Some respondents with disabilities or health problems and some older respondents valued areas where they could wait out of the path of other passengers.

**Business respondents** often said they wanted somewhere they could sit and read or work, without children and families nearby. They emphasised that the mindset of the business traveller was very different from that of the holidaymaker. They wanted to focus on the day ahead and plan their work, or have a quiet coffee and read the paper without interruptions:

*If you are on business you are in a completely different frame of mind. You do want a bit of peace and quiet; you don’t want somebody sitting next to you with a pint or a kid jostling you if you are working on your laptop. (Bristol, business, female)*

Business lounges, either provided by airlines or by the airports, were very much appreciated and valued by those who used them. In some cases, business respondents had access to
lounges through frequent flyer schemes or because they were flying business class. In other airports, lounges were available through a one-off payment or a yearly subscription, an example being the Sky Lounge at Glasgow International (although a number of business respondents said that their firms would not be prepared to pay for them). These lounges were described as offering a haven from the relative noise and bustle of the main departures area. They usually provided free snacks and drinks, as well as shower facilities, massage sessions, beauty treatments, play station games, internet access and mobile phone charging points. Respondents in a number of focus groups said they would like to see these services made available at airports where they were not currently offered.

You want somewhere that’s got a nice ambience, a relaxed feel, not a huge buzz. The Sky Lounge at Glasgow is quite nice; they have comfy seats and a free bar. You pay £15 to get in. If it’s business it’s not your money, if you’re flying [for business] you should be comfortable. (Glasgow, business, female 1)

You are away from the buzz, if you are going for a meeting and you have a tight schedule, you have things on your mind. And you can make business phone calls. (Glasgow, business, female 2)

The final group with very specific needs were smokers - in almost every focus group, some respondents said they wanted to be able to smoke somewhere once they had passed through security. These respondents found it difficult to refrain from smoking for long periods, especially in stressful situations and/or where they were waiting about for long periods (e.g. because of flight delays).

**Summary – Facilities and entertainment**

The provision of facilities and services was most important in the departure lounge. By and large, respondents were happy with the services provided - they enjoyed the wider range of facilities on offer at larger airports, but adjusted their expectations when flying through smaller airports. Some respondents had experienced poor service provision in airport food and drink outlets. They also wanted facilities to be open longer hours, and the lack of facilities at departure gates was noted by several respondents.

There were specific (and sometimes conflicting) requirements from travellers with children, and from business travellers, which were not always met. Some respondents wanted access to a smoking-permitted area.

### 3.6 Airport design and maintenance

This section covers a number of different but overlapping aspects of airport design identified as important to the passenger experience, including:

- Buildings and layout
- Inclusiveness/accessibility.
Buildings and layout

The general ambience - created by a fusion of factors such as the amount of space and light, cleanliness and levels of maintenance - appeared to have an impact on respondents’ overall sense of well-being. They were also sensitive to facilities provided for their general comfort, especially the amount, location and quality of seating in all areas of the airport.

General ambience was felt to vary significantly between airports. The new Terminal 5 at Heathrow, for those who had used it, was seen to set a UK ‘gold standard’ for large international airports in terms of space and light, although some other airports were also recommended for these qualities. In contrast, smaller airports were sometimes criticised for being ‘grotty’, for example Liverpool John Lennon, while older terminals at Heathrow and Gatwick were frequently perceived as being crowded, busy and constantly under reconstruction.

There are always bits being knocked down and bits added, it doesn’t present a particularly good image of the airport. [Heathrow and Gatwick] are both relatively old, so I suppose you should expect it, but it would be nice if they kept it out of the way. (Guildford, non-business, male)

Respondents pointed out that UK immigration control areas were sometimes unwelcoming:

It is a bit like a cattle yard. It is depressing. It is just a processing area. (Guildford, business, male)

That bit is important, impressing people coming into the country. And often when I arrive in Britain it has shabbiness somehow... that is people’s first impression of Britain. They have got to get that right. (Guildford, non-business, female)

Departure gate areas were also sometimes described as being merely functional, a factor that had more impact if respondents had experienced long periods of time there.

Finally, respondents in one focus group said they thought that security barriers, erected quickly around UK airports to prevent people from driving too close to them in the wake of the terrorist incident at Glasgow, lent a makeshift appearance to airports.

Cleanliness (particularly in toilet areas) also had a significant effect on airport experience for most respondents. Clean toilets were considered to be very important, and respondents were very sensitive to poor standards where they encountered them. Several said that the toilets in UK airports they had used in the past year were not clean enough which sent out a negative message to passengers.

Inclusiveness/accessibility

Many aspects of airport design that were identified as helpful to all respondents were particularly valued by those with disabilities, for example convenient drop-off and pick-up points and plentiful seating.
Several respondents with and without disabilities pointed out the need for careful attention to the situation and grouping of seating areas in departure lounges and at departure gates, especially ensuring spaces for wheelchairs and walking aids for those using them:

*If you have a wheelchair like my Grandad, unless you can find an end seat in departures, you can’t sit together. And if you put the wheelchair in the middle then there will be people huffing and puffing and that will just do my head in. They should have gaps so you can get a wheelchair in.* (Bristol, non-business, male)

Respondents with disabilities also wanted seating areas close to check-in (where they could wait if travelling with a companion who could queue in their place or until queues were shorter) and at security:

*Going through [security] they ask you to take your boots off. I have a serious back problem and for someone like me, trying to get a pair of boots back on, without being able to sit down, was a wee bit of a miracle. I was struggling, but there were people less able than me.* (Glasgow, non-business, female)

In addition, they emphasised the importance of having enough seats at baggage reclaim where they could wait for their luggage to arrive and/or for travelling companions to retrieve their bags.

‘Disability friendly’ routes through airports (for people with a range of different types of disability) were also raised as being important. These might include frequent ‘stopping points’ with chairs or supports for passengers to hold onto, moving pavements (present in many airports but reportedly often not working), escalators and lifts, route marking designed with people with visual impairment in mind, wide access not just for wheelchairs but also for people with sticks and other walking aids, and so on. But it was also noted that respondents assisted through airports by staff sometimes feel vulnerable if taken on obscure routes separately from other travellers and without their travelling companions.

In terms of other facilities, respondents with disabilities considered that having enough, well-sited, adapted toilets (including at the departure gate and every other journey stage) was paramount. These needed to be kept unlocked at all times to avoid respondents having to find a member of staff before being able to use them.

Some respondents with disabilities or health problems would like (possibly disability reserved) luggage trolleys to be more generally available in all parts of the airport; they used them both to avoid carrying bags and for support when walking.

Respondents with disabilities were aware of the ‘giant spaces’ in some parts of certain airports, described by one woman travelling with a broken leg in plaster as ‘intimidating spaces that have got to be traversed’.
**Summary – Airport design**

Respondents appreciated light, attractive and spacious interiors that promoted a sense of well-being but they were more powerfully affected by negative aspects of design (make-shift structures in airports, lack of cleanliness and insufficient well-placed and comfortable seating in all areas).

Various suggestions were made for how to improve airport design for those with disabilities. These included accessible drop-off and pick-up points, plentiful and well-placed seating, 'disability friendly' routes through the airport and provision of accessible toilets, all of which were thought to make airports more inclusive.

### 3.7 Cost

The subject of costs associated specifically with airports – rather than the cost of air travel more generally - was spontaneously raised by respondents in every focus group and interview. Costs were perceived to be high, especially in food outlets and parking areas; for example several respondents felt that the charges at drop-off and pick-up areas were too high and applied after very brief, almost tokenistic, amounts of time (5 or 10 minutes).

Some respondents expected high costs at airports and were even accepting of this on the grounds that airports were isolated economies where suppliers were well-placed to make higher-than-usual profits. However, other respondents felt that they were unfairly (and increasingly) ‘exploited as a captive market’. Respondents often felt that more things, such as hold luggage, were being charged for with fewer opportunities to keep costs down (e.g. by bringing their own drinks, especially bottled water).

In terms of airport fees, one particular example was raised by respondents in the Norwich groups. Recent users of Norwich airport had been charged a £5 per person development charge payable before check-in. Respondents felt the cost was high (especially for families) and suggested they had not been given any advance warning, which was a particular cause for dissatisfaction. Reflecting on the purpose of the charge, respondents felt that the development costs should have been borne directly by the owners of the airport business, rather than by its customers.

Often respondents indicated that the price they paid for their tickets affected their expectations. In general, the lower the price of their journey the less they expected and vice versa. This seemed to apply especially to aspects of the journey understood by respondents to be directly the responsibility of airlines, for example check-in (long queues and variability of queuing times) and arrangements for seat reservations and boarding. However, some respondents suggested such airlines should still meet 'minimum standards', though it was beyond the scope of the research to explore what these should be (see also sections 3.2 'Queue management' and 3.4).

Optional payments for specific enhanced services such as business lounges were suggested by some respondents. Business respondents seemed more interested in this type of facility as 'the business pays'; however, on reflection some felt that their employers would not
accept the cost. Although some non-business participants were becoming aware of additional pay-per-use airport services (such as separate lounges) they were typically not accustomed to or convinced by the concept. One passenger with Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME) who felt they would benefit from a quiet lounge was considering paying in future, but expressed resentment at 'having' to do so.

Summary – Cost

Respondents generally expected to pay higher prices at airports and whilst they did not always approve of this, they would pay the costs in the absence of any alternatives. Respondents felt that over time they have had to pay for more services and fewer free alternatives were now available. Specifically, they noted unavoidable 'airport charges', and having to pay for water because of the ban on carrying certain amounts of liquids through security.

Expectations of service were often directly related to the costs paid for the air travel but respondents who felt they were paying less still expected a minimum standard of service. Additionally, some respondents indicated that they would consider paying extra for enhanced levels of services or facilities.

3.8 Relative importance of key factors for different passenger groups

The research has shown that respondents wanted an end-to-end passenger experience that was passenger focused and afforded personal control and fairness. These principles underpinned their wide-ranging discussion of the six sets of factors that emerged as important to the passenger experience. In general order of importance these were: end-to-end reliability and efficiency, information and communication, customer care, facilities and entertainment, airport design and maintenance and cost.

Although these factors were important for all respondents, there were differences in the relative priority some groups gave to each theme. For example, end-to-end reliability and efficiency was the key priority for business travellers. They usually wanted to spend as little time as possible at the airport and were less tolerant of short delays or perceived inefficiency than were holidaymakers. In terms of facilities, they valued quiet areas and business lounges, rather than a wide range of shops and restaurants. Cost was less of an issue for them personally, although their company might have a policy of booking the cheapest flight available.

Respondents with babies and young children prioritised relevant facilities such as play and entertainment areas for children, space for prams and buggies, procedures for boarding the aircraft before other passengers and clean, easily accessible toilets and changing facilities. They were also particularly anxious about delays, in case children became bored and fractious, and started annoying other passengers. Efficiency was therefore valued in this case (to reduce the risk of delays) as well as the provision of services and facilities to make delays more bearable.
Those with disabilities, especially wheelchair users, were concerned about access and spaciousness in the departures areas. They often did not want to draw attention to themselves or be seen to ask for special treatment, but they did worry about being jostled in crowded areas. Some worried about finding a convenient place to sit down and shared heightened concerns about delays that might have an impact on their condition, its treatment or their ability to endure the journey. There were some suggestions of how to improve inclusiveness for people with different kinds of disability and impairment. General design strategies could include more seating, ensuring also that this is conveniently and considerately placed. It was felt that dedicated facilities and services could be provided for those with particular needs, for example reserved trolleys, ‘resting’ places and plentiful, permanently open disabled toilets. Discreet but proactive assistance could be offered, at the point of checking in or even when booking flights, to passengers with ‘invisible’ disabilities.

Lastly, respondents who were leisure passengers were more likely than business travellers to prioritise the range of facilities and entertainments on offer. They often looked forward to reaching the departure lounge, which they viewed as the ‘fun’ part of the airport experience and as part of their holiday. They were resentful of having this part of the journey truncated by delays getting into the departure lounge or premature calls to the departure gate. They valued having a range of shops, restaurants, bars, and cafés. They were particularly keen that food and drink should be available at reasonable prices, and were most likely to complain about being 'ripped off' by airport shops.

There appeared to be some acknowledgement – by airlines and airports - of the needs of different passenger groups, for example business and non-business travellers, families with young children and people with disabilities. But respondents felt this could be more co-ordinated and consistent across airports to improve the passenger experience of these and other groups not explicitly identified by this research (for instance groups of young holiday makers, people journeying alone or ethnic minority passengers).
4. Priorities for improvement

This chapter draws together some of the key findings about respondent priorities for improving the passenger experience at UK airports. It indicates those areas that seem to be important and are currently working reasonably well and those that seem important and where changes could make the most positive impact on the passenger experience.

4.1 Important areas that usually work well

Priority areas which currently appeared to be working well in UK airports included:

- Main car parking facilities, bus transfers from car parks, valet parking services and car pick-up services;
- On-line check-in, self check-in and fast bag-drop facilities;
- The availability of shops and restaurants in departure lounges;
- Business lounges and facilities for business travellers, whether provided by the airlines or the airports (either included as part of the ticket cost or paid for separately); and
- Assistance and services for wheelchair users, when booked in advance.

These areas were important to passengers and the high standards of service provided need to be maintained. They were, therefore, not considered priorities for improvement.

4.2 Important areas that are highly variable

Passenger experiences in other areas were highly variable, a feature which fostered a perception of unreliability and reduced passengers' ability to plan and predict. In some airports, or at some times, these elements could be very good. In other locations, or at different times of the day or year, experiences could be much less positive. These very variable areas included:

- Journey times to and from airports, especially by road where traffic was unpredictable;
- Queue management at various points
  - At check-in
  - At security
  - When boarding the aircraft
  - At immigration control on the return journey
- Facilities for children and babies, such as play areas or family areas;
- Access to the departure gates (e.g. lack of/faulty automatic walkways) and availability of seating at the gates;
- Logistics of baggage collection on returning to the UK (e.g. long waits for baggage to arrive, not enough space to remove baggage from the carousel).

It was this variability of service which was one of the main sources of stress and dissatisfaction for respondents. This was because unpredictability often made them feel
uneasy, worried and out of control. The research does, however, suggest that there are cases of best practice to share which could help to improve the experience of passengers.

4.3 Important areas that are often poor

Some areas of passenger experience were perceived by respondents to be consistently poor, and were identified as being priorities for improvement across UK airports. They include:

- 'Proactiveness' of customer care provided by airports and some airlines;
- Quality of flight information – especially for budget airlines;
- Handling of delays, including provision of information and assistance;
- Management of passenger flows through airports - specifically resulting in less time proportionally in the departure lounge where respondents wanted to be;
- Inclusiveness (facilities and services) for people with different kinds of non-visible disability or impairment (e.g. arthritis, joint problems, or mental health issues such as learning difficulties or depression);
- Availability of quiet spaces suitable for those who wanted to work at the airport; and
- Facilities (such as shops and cafés), availability of space and seating at departure gates.
5. Conclusions and implications

Although the research was carried out among just a small sample of airport passengers⁴, the findings provide valuable insight into passenger experiences and priorities.

The study shows that passenger experience is a multi-dimensional state of mind underpinned by real events. It is made up of the thoughts, views and feelings passengers have that are associated with the end-to-end journeys they take. It supports the idea that the overall quality of the passenger experience is affected by the full end-to-end journey.

In summary, the evidence suggests that airport passengers look mainly for an efficient and trouble-free passage through UK airports and in the journeys to and from airports. They are pleased if it happens because they perceive there to be little resilience in the system as a whole; disruptions, problems and delays are easily triggered by a whole host of factors from unexpected road works to late passengers.

5.1 Choice of airport

Destinations offered, availability of flights and ticket prices (i.e. factors concerning flights rather than airports) were the key influences affecting respondent choice of airports. However, all things being equal, respondents preferred to use the airport that they could get to most easily. This was often but not always their nearest airport. In addition, many preferred using a smaller airport, believing they were likely to encounter a more pleasant ambience and better standard of customer care. Those with disabilities or less confident travellers in particular often preferred smaller and/or more familiar airports.

There was some avoidance of the largest London airports, which were commonly seen as crowded and stressful. Some business respondents travelling to London for meetings worried that congestion at these airports would make them late and chose instead smaller London airports. In the case of long-haul flights involving transfers, some respondents (typically people living outside London) preferred to use European hub airports such as Amsterdam’s Schiphol or Charles de Gaulle in Paris, rather than transfer through Heathrow or Gatwick.

⁴ Please see Appendix A for more details on the sample profile. In total, 78 passengers were interviewed across 5 fieldwork locations. These passengers drew on experiences of using 25 UK airports in the 12 months from November 2007 - November 2008.
5.2 Factors affecting the quality of passenger experience

Issues raised by respondents as being important to their passenger experience fell into six broad themes: end-to-end reliability and efficiency, information and communication, customer care, facilities and entertainment, airport design and maintenance and cost. Cutting across all six themes, respondents emphasised the need for a passenger focused service that incorporates personal control and fairness.

Smoothness and predictability of the journey were the two key requirements for respondents, factors which rely on end-to-end reliability and efficiency. An important way that respondents judged efficiency was the time spent queuing. Reducing the overall time in queues was a priority that respondents felt would help relieve stress and anxiety, as well as allow them more time to enjoy themselves in other parts of the airport.

Respondents wanted accurate and convenient information and communication to help them plan their journey and feel in control, especially in departure lounges, at departure gates and in baggage areas. But information at airports – flight information especially - was often perceived to be limited, unreliable and poorly displayed.

Good customer care was also important to respondents: friendly, helpful and proactive staff who would take responsibility if issues arose, especially at ‘pinch points’ like check-in and boarding. This requirement was particularly important during delays or if problems were encountered. But it was not seen as consistently available, except at certain stages of the journey or for higher price ticket holders. In some parts of the passenger journey, respondents were unsure where to get help or advice or were unable to find the relevant staff.

Good facilities and entertainment often made respondents' time in the airport more comfortable and enjoyable, although the findings suggest that different passenger groups may have competing wants in this regard. Furthermore, respondents noted a lack of services at departure gates and more generally 'out-of-hours' facilities at some airports; the general consensus was that most amenities should be available whenever flights were running.

The study also highlights the influence of airport design and airport costs on passenger experience. Respondents suggested that the overall ambience of the airport and how clean and presentable it was projected a clear message and affected how they felt about using it. Discussions of fairness often related to costs, which were typically thought to be high due to the 'captive market' in airports. Respondents felt they were increasingly subject to high charges even to secure what they viewed as basic needs: from luggage allowances to food and drink and a quiet, comfortable seat.

There were of course differences between passenger groups, as noted throughout the report, and airports will need to take account of this if they are effectively to improve the passenger experience across their customer base.
5.3 Implications for measuring 'passenger experience' in the future

This study has shown that the passenger experience is strongly conditioned by a complex web of interrelated variables, including a range of ‘softer’ factors which cannot easily be measured by typical performance measures. Although data on queue times, for instance, can give a snapshot of how an airport is performing in one narrow respect, they do not provide a complete picture of how passengers have experienced airport processes as a whole. The research shows that, as well as the overall length of queues, how queues were managed, how staff dealt with passengers and what it meant for their onward journey were also important factors to capture. Therefore, to make monitoring more relevant to passenger experience, future measures should aim to account for the six themes mentioned in this report and address whether airport users receive a fair, passenger focused service which grants them a feeling of personal control.

More generally, the research confirmed that airport passengers can express their requirements, and are rational in their expectations. It suggests they understand that issues are complex and that trade-offs often need to be made, for example between quality of service and cost/efficiency, between passenger needs at different stages and between the needs of different passenger groups. It also implies that they recognise that they are not the only stakeholders in terms of the running and management of airports.

The study also revealed that the public is engaged with the issue and is keen to provide its perspective on airport experience. Respondents' willingness to take part in this research reveals that working with passengers in this way is practicable and can be worthwhile for airports and service providers. It can not only help airport planning and service delivery but more generally improve airport experience and possibly the reputation of airports across the board.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: Characteristics of the achieved sample

1. Focus groups

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<td>C1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White British/Irish/Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

5 Not specific to the journey type covered in the group (i.e. journeys with children could relate to leisure or business trips).
### Physical or mental impairment, illness or disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ME causing pain and extreme exhaustion and depression</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardio-vascular disease causing breathlessness and mobility problems</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken leg in plaster</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age related arthritic joint pain and stiffness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilepsy, short-term memory problems and one-sided weakness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic depression and anxiety</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non specific health problems or impairment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### No. of trips in the last 12 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trips</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 trips</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 trips</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7+ trips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Carriers used in the last 12 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carrier</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full service</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday charter</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/DK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Travelled with children under 10 in the last 12 months

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (one or more trips)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: Advance letters to respondents

1. Focus group letter

November 2008

AIRPORT PASSENGER EXPERIENCES

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this important piece of research, commissioned by the Department for Transport as part of the government’s review of how airport passenger experiences can be improved. The research is being carried out by Independent Social Research (ISR).

You have been invited to participate in an informal discussion with a small group of people about recent journeys you have taken involving air travel. The session will cover different aspects of your journeys, the high and low points and what would most improve your experiences as a passenger. The session will last a maximum of an hour and a half.

The discussion will be led by an ISR researcher, either Philly Desai or Wendy Sykes. It will be tape recorded, with your consent, so that there is an accurate record of the views expressed. Audio recordings will be kept secure and only accessed by the researchers and transcribers working on this study. They will be destroyed on completion of the project.

Before the session, it would be helpful if you could spend 5 - 10 minutes filling in the Journey Sheet that you have been given or sent.

This research is highly valued by the Department for Transport as a way of understanding air passengers’ priorities, and we hope you look forward to contributing your views. If you have any specific questions about the research or its purpose, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with Wendy Sykes at ISR (0208 883 4142) or with Rea Robey at the Department for Transport (0207 944 5732). If, for any reason, you are no longer able to attend please get in touch with your recruiter (see details overleaf). Details of your appointment are confirmed overleaf:

You will receive £35 from ISR in recognition of the time you have given to the study.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Sykes
YOUR APPOINTMENT:

The discussion group will take place on: ..............................................................

It will start at: ..........................................................

The venue for the group is: .............................................................................

If you have any queries about the appointment, please call:

................................................................. (Recruiter) on ..............................

Or

Wendy Sykes or Carola Groom on 0208 883 4142
2. In-depth interview letter

November 2008

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this important piece of research, commissioned by the Department for Transport as part of the government’s review of how airport passenger experiences can be improved. The research is being carried out by Independent Social Research (ISR).

You have been invited to participate in an interview in your own home, or elsewhere if you prefer. This will be an informal conversation about journeys you have taken involving air travel. You will be asked about different aspects of your journeys; high and low points and what would most improve your experiences as a passenger. The interview will last about an hour, and you can take a break at any point. The interview will be carried out by either Philly Desai or Wendy Sykes from ISR. It will be tape recorded, with your consent, so that there is an accurate record of your views. Audio recordings will be kept secure and only accessed by the researchers and transcribers working on this study. They will be destroyed on completion of the project.

Before the interview, it would be helpful if you could spend 5 - 10 minutes filling in the Journey Sheet that you have been given or sent.

This research is highly valued by the Department for Transport as a way of understanding air passengers’ priorities, and we hope you look forward to contributing your views. If you have any specific questions about the research or its purpose, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with Wendy Sykes at ISR (0208 883 4142) or with Rea Robey at the Department for Transport (0207 944 5732). If, for any reason, you are no longer able to attend please get in touch with your recruiter (see details overleaf). You will receive £30 from ISR in recognition of the time given to the study. See overleaf for your appointment.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Sykes
Your appointment:

The interview will take place on: ....................................................

It will start at: ..................................................

If you have any queries about the appointment, please call:

............................................................... (Your recruiter) on ........................................

Or

Wendy Sykes or Carola Groom on 0208 883 4142
APPENDIX C: Respondent pre-task

Research on UK airport passengers’ experiences (focus groups)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Before the session, we’d like you to think about journeys you’ve made via UK airports in the last two or three years. **We are interested in all aspects of your experiences at UK airports and during journeys to and from the UK airports**, but not in flights themselves:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey out:</th>
<th>Journey from home or other start to UK airport</th>
<th>What happened at the UK airport on the way out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journey back:</td>
<td>What happened at the UK airport on the way back</td>
<td>Journey from UK airport to home or other destination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note down your thoughts on what went well either on the journey out or back **and** anything that could have been improved or that caused you a problem. Bring this sheet with you to the discussion so you can share your experiences with the other people in the session.

**Three things that went well**

1. 

2. 

3. 

**Three things that could have been improved or that caused you a problem**

1. 

2. 

3.
Research on UK airport passengers’ experiences (depth interviews)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Before the interview, we’d like you to think about journeys you’ve made via UK airports in the last two or three years. We are interested in all aspects of your experiences at UK airports and during journeys to and from the UK airports, but not in flights themselves:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey out:</th>
<th>Journey from home or other start to UK airport</th>
<th>What happened at the UK airport on the way out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journey back:</td>
<td>What happened at the UK airport on the way back</td>
<td>Journey from UK airport to home or other destination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note down your thoughts on what went well either on the journey out or back and anything that could have been improved or that caused you a problem. Bring this sheet with you to the interview so you can share your experiences with the interviewer.

Three things that went well

1. 

2. 

3. 

Three things that could have been improved or that caused you a problem

1. 

2. 

3.
Appendix D: Journey stage diagram

Getting to the airport
- Travelling from your starting point to the airport (including changes/transfers)

In the airport building
- Check-in
- Passport control & security
- Departure lounge and facilities
- Getting to the departure gate
- At the departure gate

Before departure
- Boarding the plane
- Waiting for take-off

Getting home (or other destination)
- Travelling to your final destination (including changes/transfers home)

In the airport building
- Getting transfers/onward flights
- Immigration control
- Baggage reclaim
- Customs
- Arrivals area

Landing & disembarkation
- Landing
- Taxi-ing to stand
- Getting off the plane
APPENDIX E: Topic guides

Airport passenger experience focus groups (non-business)
Post-pilot topic guide final version – 19.11.08

Note on the guide: This discussion guide provides a template for the focus groups, setting out the main topic areas to be covered and an overall structure for each session. In practice sessions may evolve differently, depending on what respondents have to say and when they want to say it. Questions set out on the guide are a reminder to the moderator of the issues to be raised under different headings, but may not be asked as worded.

Introduction to the research
The government is conducting a review of the regulation of UK airports that was launched by the Secretary of State for Transport earlier this year.
A key aim of the review is to look at how passenger experiences of UK airports, including the journey to and from UK airports, could be improved.
This research has been commissioned by the Department for Transport and will provide valuable information about:

1. The kinds of experiences that people have at UK airports, and during their journeys to and from them
2. Which parts of the passenger journey impact most on overall experience, both when travelling to and from UK airports and at airports themselves
3. And the areas where they feel there is most room for improvement.

To do this, a series of group discussions and depth interviews are being carried out by independent researchers among groups of respondents at different locations around Great Britain.
In this group the focus is on passengers travelling for reasons that are not connected with their work or business. Other groups will cover business travellers. Even if you sometimes fly for work, please bear in mind that we are interested here only in your experiences when flying for leisure or other non-business reasons.
There are no right or wrong answers; all we are interested in are your experiences and your opinions – whatever they may be.

Introductions to DfT staff if present. Length of session and other housekeeping

Recording and confidentiality
Moderator, remind respondents about recording and confidentiality before switching on.
PROPOSED TIMINGS (WITH 5 MINUTES SPARE):
Stage 1: 30 mins
Stage 2: 25 mins
Stage 3: 30 mins
FIRST STAGE (30 MINUTES)

Introduction/warm up 5 mins
ASK ONE AT A TIME (ROUND THE TABLE ONCE ONLY)
- First names only, where live, family status
- How many trips did they take?
- Which UK airports have they used in the last year?
- Where did they last go? What was the purpose of the trip?
- Who do they usually travel with?

Air travel and airports – general attitudes 5 mins
NOT TOO MUCH DETAIL AT THIS STAGE

- What do they feel about air travel, and why?
  - What do they feel about flying itself? (briefly)
    - Are they ‘matter of fact’ in their approach?
    - Do they find it exciting, frightening, stressful, relaxing? Why?
  - What do they feel about the parts of the journey either side of the flight itself? (also briefly)
    - On the way out
      - Routine necessity? What else (eg ‘part of the fun’)? Why?
    - On the way back
      - Routine necessity? What else? Why?
- What about the airport itself? Does it make any difference which airport they fly from when they are flying for non-business reasons (holiday or other)?
  - Do they have a favourite UK airport? Which and why?
  - Do they have a least favourite? Which and why?
  - How far are airports ‘all the same’? Or not? From the leisure passengers point of view what makes some stand out more than others?
- What do they do at airports apart from the travel routine itself – shopping, reading, eating, drinking, and entertainments? How far are these an important part of the airport experience?

End-to-end journey experiences - review of pre-task 20 mins
MAKE SURE EVERYONE HAS A TURN. WRITE UP POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES FROM PRE-TASK. FOCUS ON GOOD EXPERIENCES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT RELEVANT TO RESEARCH (IE AVOID ‘BAD’ EXPERIENCES CAUSED BY EXTERNAL EVENTS SUCH AS OVERSLEEPING AND MISSING A FLIGHT). WRITE UP RESPONSES ON FLIP CHART. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE/MOST AND LEAST IMPORTANT ENCOURAGE GROUP TO SUMMARISE AND DISCUSS MAIN THEMES.
MIDDLE STAGE (25 MINUTES)

Journey stages

INTRODUCE THIS SECTION ACKNOWLEDGING THAT DISCUSSION HAS ALREADY BEEN WIDE RANGING, BUT THAT THE CLIENT WANTS TO TRY AND GET AT MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT PASSENGER EXPERIENCES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE JOURNEY. HAND OUT JOURNEY STAGE DIAGRAM, FOCUS DISCUSSION ON WHAT WORKS WELL AND WHAT WOULD IMPROVE PASSENGER EXPERIENCES AT DIFFERENT STAGES, PROBE REASONS FULLY. USE DIAGRAM AS VISUAL PROMPT FOR RESPONDENTS. INVITE THEM TO TALK ABOUT WHAT GOES WELL/NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED AT DIFFERENT STAGES. MAKE SURE BOTH JOURNEY OUT AND BACK ARE COVERED. START SOME GROUPS OFF FOCUSING ON THE RETURN JOURNEY. NO NEED TO GO SYSTEMATICALLY IN DETAIL THROUGH THE STAGES – BE GUIDED BY RESPONDENTS.

THROUGHOUT, MODERATOR ALSO TO PROBE ON DIFFERENCES IN OPINION ACCORDING TO-

- Time of day or night
- Season of travel (peak/off peak)
- Who you are travelling with/ with or without children
- Class of travel (first/ premium/ business/economy)
- Airline type (full service/ charter/ budget)

If security/security issues are mentioned (ie, terrorist threat), probe as appropriate. If not raised by respondents, do not introduce the topic.

ISSUES OF KEY INTEREST TO DFT

- What affects choice of airport – how far are different factors likely to determine where they choose to fly from
- How reliable do they perceive the whole journey to be? Do they always build in extra time for unexpected delays? At what points (journey there/check-in/security/plane delays etc?) And how does this affect how they approach the journey/ how they plan/ their choice of airport? What do they feel about it?
- More on expectations they have about how things are likely to go (that set a context for how they feel about what actually happens)
- How far do they expect delays? Why do they expect them? Do they expect delays more with some airlines than others?
- Do expectations vary with airline? Cost of flight etc?

MODERATOR CHECKLIST FOR JOURNEY STAGES BELOW. MORE IMPORTANT TOPICS BELOW ARE IN BOLD.
JOURNEY OUT

a. **Getting to UK airports**
   - Airport location
   - How do you usually get to the airport?
   - Why do you choose this way? Eg.
     - Lack of alternative
     - Convenience
     - Affordability
     - Journey time reliability
     - Frequency of service
   - Does this influence your choice of airport?
   - Parking and transfer to airport building
   - Taxi drop-off/bus or train interchange and transfer to airport building

b. **Checking in**
   - Finding your way (to check-in/correct check-in desk)
   - Queuing (How acceptable are queue lengths, length of time, queue control and manners/etiquette)
   - IF PROBLEMS WITH CHECK-IN PROCESS, ASK: Has anyone complained about check-in services? How did they do this, how was it handled?
   - Layout of the check-in areas
   - On-line or automatic check-in facilities
   - Proximity and signage to security/passport control

c. **Passport control/security**
   - Queuing (How acceptable are queue lengths, length of time there and system)
   - Number of desks open
   - Staff helpfulness/friendliness
   - Advance information/reminders about security requirements
   - Provision of facilities for re-organising luggage
   - Security searches (removing belts/shoes, emptying pockets, bag searches, security arches and body searches)
   - Provisions for passengers in a hurry

d. **Using airport facilities and waiting in departure lounge**
   - Services and facilities (which services do you value - eating, shopping, toilets/washing etc)
   - General comfort/ space/seating and layout of the area
   - Information displays about:
     - Flights and gates
     - Delays and cancellations (and reasons)
   - Announcements
   - Facilities for delayed passengers
Probe here for issues around the ambience of the airport. What does it look like, how does it feel to be there?

Are there some airports which have a better atmosphere/ are more pleasant places to be than others? What are the factors that account for this?

Also probe here for specific issues concerning the facilities and services which people use and value. No need to cover these specifically but examples include:

- Shops
- Toilets/ washrooms
- Catering outlets/restaurants
- Places to sit and relax – even sleep
- Cash facilities
- Internet access (internet terminals/wireless hotspots)
- Medical facilities/help/first aid
- Entertainment/game arcades
- Family facilities (eg baby changing, family friendly restaurants, kid’s lounge/crèche/play area)
- Business/first class lounges
- Prayer rooms and airport chaplains

e. **Departure gate**
- Finding and getting to the gate (signage, distance, moving corridors, escalators/stairs/lifts)
- Availability and need for escalators/ lifts/ staircases
- Facilities at/near gate (toilets, refreshments, shops etc); do you have different requirements/ facilities if there is a delay?
- General comfort/space/seating and layout of the area
- Information
- Availability of staff

f. **Before take-off**
- Boarding mechanisms (including bus shuttle, walking to the plane and direct entry via a bridge)
- Waiting for take-off

**FLIGHT TRANSFER (IN UK AIRPORTS)**
- Connection planning
- Information about what you need to do
- Transfer lounge – area, seating facilities
JOURNEY BACK

a. **Landing and disembarking**
   - Time waiting to disembark
   - Transfer to airport (including bus shuttle, walking from the plane and direct entry via a bridge)

b. **Getting into the airport**
   - **Getting to immigration control/baggage reclaim (signage, distance, escalators, stairs etc)**
   - Entrance areas
   - Presence and helpfulness of staff
   - Signage and information
   - Distance to walk

c. **Immigration control**
   - **Size and layout of passport control hall**
   - **Queues and queue management (including number of gates)**

d. **Baggage reclaim**
   - Signposts to reclaim area and carousel information
   - Waiting time for luggage to arrive at the carousel
   - **Toilets and other facilities/services in baggage reclaim area**
   - Presence and helpfulness of staff
   - Carousels – speed, height and ease of retrieving luggage
   - **Size and layout of baggage reclaim**

e. **Customs and arrivals area**
   - Signposting for customs and channels for declare/nothing to declare (e.g. clarity?)
   - Baggage searches
   - Number and helpfulness/friendliness of staff
   - Information about onward travel (e.g. provision of information points, signs to trains/taxis/buses)
   - General facilities (e.g. cash points, toilets, telephones, waiting areas)

f. **Journey from airport (IF DIFFERENT FROM JOURNEY THERE)**
   - Parking payment and getting to car parks
   - Taxi /bus/train interchanges
   - Choice of modes of travel
   - Affordability
   - Convenience
   - Journey time reliability
FINAL STAGE 30 MINUTES

Prioritisation exercise – 25 mins

USE BLANK SORT CARDS TO GIVE TO PARTICIPANTS. ALLOW THEM TO WRITE THREE OR FOUR THINGS WHICH ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES FOR THEM. THEN GET EVERYONE TO SAY WHAT THEY HAVE WRITTEN AND SORT THE CARDS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY. EXPLORE BOTH THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE AIRPORT EXPERIENCE, AND THOSE WHICH REQUIRE MOST IMPROVEMENT – THEY COULD BE DIFFERENT. ENSURE A RECORD IS KEPT OF THE OUTCOMES.

Round up and ending – 5 mins

- What single change would make the greatest positive impact on their experiences of using airports?
- ISR to take any questions, explain how findings will be used: consultation proposals will be published in Spring 2009, this research will feed into the proposals.

AT THE END COLLECT IN BOTH THE JOURNEY SHEETS AND THE PRIORITISATION SHEETS

THANKS AND PERMISSION TO RECONTACT. ASK VOLUNTEERS TO FILL IN CONSENT FORMS AND SIGN
Note on the guide: This discussion guide provides a template for the focus groups, setting out the main topic areas to be covered and an overall structure for each session. In practice, sessions may evolve differently, depending on what respondents have to say and when they want to say it. Questions set out on the guide are a reminder to the moderator of the issues to be raised under different headings, but may not be asked as worded.

Introduction to the research

The government is conducting a review of the regulation of UK airports that was launched by the Secretary of State for Transport earlier this year. A key aim of the review is to look at how passenger experiences of UK airports, including the journey to and from UK airports, could be improved. This research has been commissioned by the Department for Transport and will provide valuable information about:

1. The kinds of experiences that people have at UK airports, and during their journeys to and from them
2. Which parts of the passenger journey impact most on overall experience, both when travelling to and from UK airports and at airports themselves
3. And the areas where they feel there is most room for improvement.

To do this, a series of group discussions and depth interviews are being carried out by independent researchers among groups of respondents at different locations around Great Britain.

In this group the focus is on passengers travelling for reasons that are connected with their work or business. Other groups will cover leisure travellers. Even if you sometimes fly for reasons that are not to do with work, our discussion here should refer mostly to your experiences when flying for business reasons. There are no right or wrong answers; all we are interested in are your experiences and your opinions – whatever they may be.

Introduction to DfT staff if present. Length of session and other housekeeping

Recording and confidentiality

Moderator, remind respondents about recording and confidentiality before switching on.

PROPOSED TIMINGS (WITH 5 MINUTES SPARE):

Stage 1: 30 mins
Stage 2: 25 mins
Stage 3: 30 mins
FIRST STAGE (30 MINUTES)

Introduction/warm up 5 mins
ASK ONE AT A TIME (ROUND THE TABLE ONCE ONLY)

- First names only, where live, where work
- Which UK airports have they used in the last year for work trips?
- How many trips have they taken for work?
- Where did they last go? What was the purpose of the trip?
- Who do they usually travel with?

Air travel and airports – general attitudes 5 mins
NOT TOO MUCH DETAIL AT THIS STAGE

- What do they feel about air travel, and why?
  o What do they feel about flying itself? (briefly)
    ▪ Are they ‘matter of fact’ in their approach?
    ▪ Do they find it stressful, relaxing? Why?
  o What do they feel about the parts of the journey either side of the flight itself? (also briefly)
    ▪ On the way out
      • Routine necessity? What else (eg ‘part of the fun’)? Why?
    ▪ On the way back
      • Routine necessity? What else? Why?
- How far do they feel that airports are ‘all the same’? Or not? From the business passenger’s point of view, what makes some stand out more than others?
  o Do they have a favourite UK airport? Which and why?
  o Do they have a least favourite? Which and why?
- When travelling on business are their concerns and priorities different from when travelling for leisure? In what way (briefly)
- What do they do at airports apart from the travel routine itself – working, shopping, reading, eating, drinking, and entertainments? How far are these an important part of the airport experience?

End-to-end journey experiences - review of pre-task 20 mins
USE PRE-DIVIDED FLIP CHART (POSITIVE/NEGATIVE). MAKE SURE EVERYONE HAS A TURN. WRITE UP POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES FROM PRE-TASK. FOCUS ON GOOD EXPERIENCES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT RELEVANT TO RESEARCH (IE AVOID ‘BAD’ EXPERIENCES CAUSED BY EXTERNAL EVENTS SUCH AS OVERSLEEPING AND MISSING A FLIGHT). WRITE UP RESPONSES ON FLIP CHART. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE/MOST AND LEAST IMPORTANT ENCOURAGE GROUP TO SUMMARISE AND DISCUSS MAIN THEMES.
**MIDDLE STAGE (25 MINUTES)**

**Journey stages**

INTRODUCE THIS SECTION ACKNOWLEDGING THAT DISCUSSION HAS ALREADY BEEN WIDE RANGING, BUT THAT THE CLIENT WANTS TO TRY AND GET AT MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT BUSINESS TRAVELLERS’ EXPERIENCES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE JOURNEY. HAND OUT JOURNEY STAGE DIAGRAM, FOCUS DISCUSSION ON WHAT WORKS WELL AND WHAT WOULD IMPROVE PASSENGER EXPERIENCES AT DIFFERENT STAGES, PROBE REASONS FULLY. USE DIAGRAM AS VISUAL PROMPT FOR RESPONDENTS. INVITE THEM TO TALK ABOUT WHAT GOES WELL/NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED AT DIFFERENT STAGES. MAKE SURE BOTH JOURNEY OUT AND BACK ARE COVERED. START SOME GROUPS OFF FOCUSING ON THE RETURN JOURNEY. NO NEED TO GO SYSTEMATICALLY IN DETAIL THROUGH THE STAGES – BE GUIDED BY RESPONDENTS.

THROUGHOUT, MODERATOR ALSO TO PROBE ON DIFFERENCES IN OPINION ACCORDING TO-

- Time of day or night
- Season of travel (peak/off peak)
- Who you are travelling with
- Class of travel (first/ premium/ business/economy)
- Airline type (full service/ charter/ budget)

If security issues are mentioned (ie, terrorist threat), probe as appropriate. If not raised by respondents, do not introduce the topic.

**ISSUES OF KEY INTEREST TO DFT**

- What affects choice of airport – how far are different factors likely to determine where they choose to fly from?
- How reliable do they perceive the whole journey to be? Do they always build in extra time for unexpected delays? At what points (journey there/check-in/security/plane delays etc?) And how does this affect how they approach the journey/ how they plan/ their choice of airport? What do they feel about it?
- More on expectations they have about how things are likely to go (that set a context for how they feel about what actually happens)
- How far do they expect delays? Why do they expect them? Do they expect delays more with some airlines than others?
- Do expectations vary with airline? Cost of flight etc?

**MODERATOR CHECKLIST FOR JOURNEY STAGES BELOW. MORE IMPORTANT TOPICS BELOW ARE IN BOLD.**
JOURNEY OUT

g. **Getting to UK airports**
   - Airport location
   - How do you usually get to the airport?
   - Why do you choose this way? Eg.
     - Lack of alternative
     - Convenience
     - Affordability
     - Journey time reliability
     - Frequency of service
   - Does this influence your choice of airport?
   - Parking and transfer to airport building
   - Taxi drop-off/bus or train interchange and transfer to airport building

h. **Checking in**
   - Finding your way (to check-in/correct check-in desk)
   - Queuing (How acceptable are queue lengths, length of time, queue control and manners/etiquette)
   - IF PROBLEMS WITH CHECK-IN PROCESS, ASK: Has anyone complained about check-in services? How did they do this, how was it handled?
   - Layout of the check-in areas
     - On-line or automatic check-in facilities
     - Priority business check-in queues
     - Proximity and signage to security/passport control
     - Has anyone complained about check-in services? How did they do this, how was it handled?

i. **Passport control/security**
   - Queuing (How acceptable are queue lengths, length of time there and system)
   - Number of desks open
   - Staff helpfulness/friendliness
   - Advance information/reminders about security requirements
   - Provision of facilities for re-organising luggage
   - Security searches (removing belts/shoes, emptying pockets, bag searches, security arches and body searches)
   - Provisions for passengers in a hurry

j. **Using airport facilities and waiting in departure lounge**
   - Services and facilities (which services do you value - eating, shopping, toilets/washing etc)
   - General comfort/ space/seating and layout of the area
   - Information displays about:
Probes and gates
- Delays and cancellations (and reasons)
- Announcements
- Facilities for delayed passengers

Probe here for issues around the ambience of the airport. What does it look like, how does it feel to be there?

Are there some airports which have a better atmosphere/ are more pleasant places to be than others? What are the factors which drive this?

Also probe here for specific issues concerning the facilities and services which business travellers use and value. Potential question areas include:

- Business/first class lounges
- Meeting rooms
- Internet (Internet terminals/wireless hotspots)
- VIP areas/ first class lounges
- Shops
- Catering outlets/restaurants
- Places to sit and relax – even sleep
- Cash facilities/ other banking
- Entertainment/games rooms arcades
- Medical facilities/help/first aid
- Toilets/washrooms
- Prayer rooms and airport chaplains

k. **Departure gate**
- Finding and getting to the gate (signage, distance, moving corridors, escalators/stairs/lifts)
- Availability and need for escalators/ lifts/ staircases
- Facilities at/near gate (toilets, refreshments, shops etc); do you have different requirements/ facilities if there is a delay?
- General comfort/space/seating and layout of the area
- Information
- Availability of staff

l. **Before take-off**
- Boarding mechanisms (including bus shuttle, walking to the plane and direct entry via a bridge)
- Waiting for take-off
FLIGHT TRANSFER (IN UK AIRPORTS)
- Time waiting to disembark
- Transfer to airport (including bus shuttle, walking from the plane and direct entry via a bridge)

JOURNEY BACK

g. Landing and disembarking
- Time waiting to disembark
- Transfer to airport (including bus shuttle, walking from the plane and direct entry via a bridge)

h. Getting into the airport
- Getting to immigration control/baggage reclaim (signage, distance, escalators, stairs etc)
  - Entrance areas
  - Presence and helpfulness of staff
  - Signage and information
  - Distance to walk

i. Immigration control
- Size and layout of passport control hall
- Queues and queue management (including number of gates)

j. Baggage reclaim
- Signposts to reclaim area and carousel information
- Waiting time for luggage to arrive at the carousel
- Toilets and other facilities/services in baggage reclaim area
  - Presence and helpfulness of staff
  - Carousels – speed, height and ease of retrieving luggage
  - Size and layout of baggage reclaim

k. Customs and arrivals area
- Signposting for customs and channels for declare/nothing to declare (e.g. clarity?)
- Baggage searches
- Number and helpfulness/friendliness of staff
- Information about onward travel (e.g. provision of information points, signs to trains/taxis/buses)
- General facilities (e.g. cash points, toilets, telephones, waiting areas)

l. Journey from airport
- Parking payment and getting to car parks
- Taxi/bus/train interchanges
- Choice of modes of travel
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- Affordability
- Convenience
- Journey time reliability

**FINAL STAGE 30 MINUTES**

**Prioritisation exercise – 25 mins**

USE BLANK SORT CARDS TO GIVE TO PARTICIPANTS. ALLOW THEM TO WRITE THREE OR FOUR THINGS WHICH ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES FOR THEM. THEN GET EVERYONE TO SAY WHAT THEY HAVE WRITTEN AND SORT THE CARDS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY. EXPLORE BOTH THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE AIRPORT EXPERIENCE, AND THOSE WHICH REQUIRE MOST IMPROVEMENT – THEY COULD BE DIFFERENT. ENSURE A RECORD IS KEPT OF THE OUTCOMES.

Round up and ending – 5 mins

- What single change would make the greatest positive impact on their experiences of using airports for business journeys?
- ISR to take any questions, explain how findings will be used: consultation proposals will be published in Spring 2009, this research will feed into the proposals.

AT THE END COLLECT IN BOTH THE JOURNEY SHEETS AND THE PRIORITISATION SHEETS

**THANKS AND PERMISSION TO RECONTACT. ASK VOLUNTEERS TO FILL IN CONSENT FORMS AND SIGN**
Airport passenger experience depth interviews
(Older people and people with disabilities/impairments)

Post-pilot topic guide

**Note on the guide:** This discussion guide provides a template for the interviews, setting out the main topic areas to be covered and an overall structure for each interview. In practice, interviews may evolve differently, depending on what respondents have to say and when they want to say it. Questions set out on the guide are a reminder to the interviewer of the issues to be raised under different headings, but may not be asked as worded. Throughout the guide, probes related to be disability/older people’s issues will be prioritised; general issues will be explored if mentioned by the respondent, but we will not probe for these.

Introduction to the research
Researcher to show copy of DfT respondent letter and business card with name at door.
The government is conducting a review of the regulation of UK airports that was launched by the Secretary of State for Transport earlier this year.
A key aim of the review is to look at how passenger experiences of UK airports, including the journey to and from UK airport, could be improved.
This research has been commissioned by the Department for Transport and will provide valuable information about:

1. The kinds of experiences that people have at UK airports, and during their journeys to and from them
2. Which parts of the passenger journey impact most on overall experience, What matters most to airport passengers both when travelling to and from UK airports and at airports themselves
3. And the areas where they feel there is most room for improvement.

To do this, a series of group discussions and in-depth interviews are being carried out by independent researchers at different locations across Great Britain. ISR is not part of the Government or the air travel industry – we are entirely independent. We are talking to a range of people to understand some of the different needs and experiences people have of using airports. Therefore, throughout the conversation, I’d like you to talk about your personal experience of airports and what things you consider are priorities.
There are no right or wrong answers; all we are interested in is your experiences and your opinions – whatever they may be. [Note: if a carer is present we will get their views as well, but will prioritise the opinions of the primary respondent.]

**Length of session, respondent can take a break at any point, and other housekeeping**

Recording and confidentiality
Interviewer, remind respondents about recording and confidentiality before switching on.
“The research is confidential and we will not reveal your name or personal details to anyone outside the research team.”

**Stages and approximate timings:**
- A FIRST STAGE: 20
- B SECOND STAGE: 25
- C THIRD STAGE: 15
WHERE APPROPRIATE THROUGHOUT, PROBE IN DETAIL ANY MENTIONS OF ISSUES RELATED TO RESPONDENT’S DISABILITY/AGE

FIRST STAGE (20 minutes)

Introduction/warm up – 5 mins
- Household composition, if working ask briefly about occupation
- Which UK airports have they used recently?
- Where have they travelled by plane to in the last year or so? Was it for a holiday, to visit someone or for work/other purpose?
- Effect of disability/age:
  People with disabilities
  - MODERATOR TO INTRODUCE: You mentioned to the recruiter that you [INSERT APPROPRIATE DISABILITY WORDING FROM RECRUITMENT QRE], can you tell me a bit more about that [briefly]? e.g. whether it affects what they can do at all
  - IF APPROPRIATE: Do they have a carer/helper?
  Older people
  - IF APPROPRIATE: Do they have any help around the home/a carer?

Air travel and airports – general attitudes – 10 mins
THROUGHOUT SECTION PROBE FOR ISSUES RELATED TO DISABILITY/AGE AS APPROPRIATE
- What do they feel about air travel, and why?
  - What do they feel about flying itself?
  - And what about the journey to and from the airport?
- What about the airport itself? Does it make any difference which airport they fly from?
  - Do they have a favourite UK airport? Which and why?
  - Do they have a least favourite? Which and why?

End-to-end journey experiences - review of pre-task – 5 mins
ASK WHETHER THEY WERE GIVEN A PRE-TASK SHEET FROM THE RECRUITER. DID THEY MANAGE TO FILL IT IN? IF NOT, COVER KEY GOOD EXPERIENCES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE STAGE-BY-STAGE JOURNEY IN STAGE 2.

- Ask them to describe and explain the experiences listed on their journey sheets and their relative importance. Explore in depth any aspects related to disability/ age. Where relevant, use prompts such as ‘What could have been done to make that situation better?’ and ‘Would that affect your choice of airport in the future?’ etc.
MIDDLE STAGE (25 MINUTES)

Journey stages

INTRODUCE THIS SECTION ACKNOWLEDGING THAT DISCUSSION HAS ALREADY BEEN WIDE RANGING, BUT THAT THE CLIENT WANTS TO TRY AND GET AT MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT PASSENGER EXPERIENCES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE JOURNEY. HAND OUT JOURNEY STAGE DIAGRAM. FOCUS DISCUSSION ON WHAT WORKS WELL AND WHAT WOULD IMPROVE PASSENGER EXPERIENCES AT DIFFERENT STAGES, PROBE REASONS FULLY. THROUGHOUT FOCUS, WHERE APPROPRIATE, ON ISSUES RELEVANT TO DISABILITY/AGE AND RELATIVE IMPORTANCE COMPARED TO OTHER COMMON FACTORS SUCH AS:

- Time of day, season of travel
- Who you are travelling with
- Travel class & airline type: (Budget/no frills; Full service; Charter/package); (first/premium/business/economy)

INTERVIEWER: WHERE POSSIBLE, IF PARTICIPANT MENTIONS ISSUES RELATED TO AGE/DISABILITY, ASK FOR EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE/ SITUATIONS WHERE SERVICES ARE MORE TAILORED TO THEIR NEEDS. ASK MAINLY ABOUT TRIPS IN LAST 12 MONTHS, BUT ALSO OTHER RECENT AIR TRAVEL THROUGH UK AIRPORTS.

A. THE JOURNEY STAGES - OUTWARD

a. Getting to the airport

- How did you get to the airport?
- Why did you choose this way?
- How does getting to the airport affect which airport you fly from, if at all?

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED, e.g.

- What kind of choices did you have in how you got to airports? How did you find out about getting to the airport? E.g. Internet, friends/family.
- How accessible was the transport you used? Did it suit your needs or not?
- Have you ever had any special help or assistance in getting to the airport?

TOPICS THAT MAY EMERGE INCLUDE:

- Assistance and help points
- Disabled parking (Blue badge – previously orange badge)
- Help with transfer to terminals/airport building
- Advance information on accessibility/recommended routes for those with mobility needs
Independent Social Research

- Porters and disability trained transport and other staff
- Reserved seating areas

OTHER GENERAL TOPICS:
- Airport location
- Choice of modes of travel
- Convenience
- Frequency of service
- Journey time reliability
- Parking and transfer to airport building
- Taxi drop-off/bus or train interchange and transfer to airport building

b. In the airport building

i. Getting around the airport & checking in
   - How easy was it to get around the airport?
   - How do you feel about check-in?
   - And what about queuing specifically?
   - How acceptable were queue lengths and how they were dealt with?
   - What about the layout of check-in areas?

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED e.g.
- Feelings about different types of check-in process (online check-in services or desk-based services)
- If participants or carers raise complaints about the check-in process probe whether they made a formal complaint, did they know who to speak to?
- How could the check-in area be improved?

TOPICS THAT MAY EMERGE INCLUDE:

- Clear signage (e.g. large text, black on yellow)
- Porters/disability assistance/buggies
- Disability trained staff
- Induction loops
- Low level flight information screens
- Accessible toilets

OTHER GENERAL TOPICS:
- Finding your way (to check-in/your check-in desk)
- Provision of information
- Provision/use of on-line or automatic check-in facilities
- Queuing (length of time, queue control and manners/etiquette)
Proximity and signage to security/passport control

ii. **Passport control/security**
   - How did you feel about going through passport control and security?
   - And what about queuing specifically?
   - How acceptable were queue lengths and how they were dealt with?

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED e.g.
   - Was any consideration made of your needs when going through security?
   - What could have been improved? (e.g. seats for older people/separate process for those with less mobility/ in a wheelchair).
   - Did this differ to your experience at check-in?

OTHER GENERAL TOPICS THAT MAY EMERGE:
   - Number of desks open
   - Staff helpfulness/friendliness
   - Advance information/reminders about security requirements (e.g. liquids, sharp objects)
   - Whether regulations affected any medication carried and how that was dealt with
   - Provision of facilities for re-organising hand luggage
   - Security searches (removing belts/shoes, emptying pockets, bag searches, security arches and body searches)
   - Provisions for passengers in a hurry

iii. **Using airport facilities/ waiting in departure lounge**
   - How did you feel about the departures lounge and their services?
   - What kind of services and facilities do you value?
   - How important is the amount of space available and layout?
   - Does that change if you experience delays?

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED e.g.
   - How important are the facilities offered in departures lounges to you? (quality, choice available)
   - How accessible are they? Can you easily get help, if needed?
   - What about the information provided (e.g. gate numbers, flight updates etc.) is it helpful/accessible?

OTHER GENERAL TOPICS THAT MAY EMERGE:
   - Services and facilities (eating, shopping, toilets, telephones etc)
   - General comfort (e.g. availability of seats)
iv. **Departure gate**
- What kind of experiences have you had getting to departure gates?
- When you get there, what kind of services and facilities do you value?
- How important is the amount of space available and layout?
- Does that change if you experience delays?

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED e.g.
- Finding and getting to the gate (signage, distance, moving corridors)
- Availability and need for escalators/lifts/staircases
- Facilities at/near gate (toilets, refreshments, shops etc)
- Seating
- Information
- Availability of staff

c. **Before departure**

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED e.g.
- Did staff make adequate provisions to help you onto the plane? E.g. priority boarding, providing a wheelchair.
- Boarding mechanisms (including bus shuttle, walking to the plane and direct entry via a bridge)

**B THE JOURNEY STAGES – RETURN**

a. **Landing & disembarkation**
- Were your experiences of getting off the plane any better/worse than boarding? E.g. priority disembarkation, providing a wheelchair as before.

GENERAL TOPICS THAT MAY EMERGE:
- Time waiting to disembark
- Transfer to airport (including bus shuttle, walking from the plane and direct entry via a bridge)
b. In the airport building

i. Getting into the airport
   • What kind of experiences have you had getting from arrival gate to immigration control/baggage reclaim?

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED e.g.
   • If you required assistance, was that easy to arrange?
     o Entrance areas
     o Presence and helpfulness of staff
     o Signage and information
     o Distance to walk
     o Availability and need for escalators/lifts/staircases

IF RELEVANT – CHECK FOR EXPERIENCE OF TRANSFERS IN UK AIRPORTS
   ii. Transfer information/services and transit lounges

iii. Immigration control
   • How do you feel about immigration control [briefly]?
   • And what about queuing specifically?
   • How acceptable are queue lengths and how they are dealt with?
   • What about the layout of immigration control areas?

USE ADDITIONAL PROBES IF REQUIRED e.g.
   • Was any consideration made of your needs when going through immigration control? What could have been improved? (e.g. seats for older people/separate process for those with less mobility/ in a wheelchair).
     o Size and layout of passport control hall
     o Queues and queue management (including number of gates)

iv. Baggage reclaim
   • What have been your experiences of baggage reclaim?
   • How much does space and layout matter?
   • And what about facilities offered?

GENERAL TOPICS THAT MAY EMERGE:
   o Signposts to reclaim area and carousel information
   o Waiting time for luggage to arrive at the carousel
   o Toilets and other facilities/services in baggage reclaim area
Presence and helpfulness of staff
Carousels – speed, height and ease of retrieving luggage

v. **Customs & arrival area**

**GENERAL TOPICS THAT MAY EMERGE:**
- Signposting for customs and channels for declare/nothing to declare (e.g. clarity?)
- Baggage searches
- Number and helpfulness/friendliness of staff
- Information about onward travel (e.g. provision of information points, signs to trains/taxis/buses)
- General facilities (e.g. cash points, toilets, telephones, waiting areas)

c. **Journey home**

ASK ABOUT JOURNEY HOME AND ISSUES SURROUNDING THIS IF DIFFERENT FROM JOURNEY OUT.

**FINAL STAGE 15 MINUTES**

**Prioritisation exercise – 10 mins**

IN LIGHT OF THE PREVIOUS DISCUSSION, WHAT ARE THE KEY THINGS THAT YOU THINK NEED TO BE IMPROVED IN AIRPORT JOURNEYS? MAKE A LIST OF THE TOP THREE OR FOUR ASPECTS, AND EXPLORE WHY THESE SPECIFIC ISSUES ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE RESPONDENT.

**Round up and ending – 5 mins**

- What single change would make the greatest positive impact on your personal experience of using UK airports?
- IF APPROPRIATE: What should the airport authorities bear in mind when thinking about how to improve the experiences of passengers with disabilities or health problems/older passengers?
- ISR to answer any questions, explain how findings will be used, next steps etc.